

## THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE CREATES A CARING, NON-COMDEMNING COMMUNITY Galatians 6:1-5

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Did you meet anyone new after worship service last Sunday?

### INTRODUCTION

Honestly, what are some of your reactions when you discover that a Christian you know has sinned?

In Galatians 5:13-26, the picture Paul paints of Christians and of the Christian church is a very optimistic one. He commands that Christians use their freedom to serve one another and thus fulfill the law, which is summed up in the one command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He says that when people live by the Spirit they will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and not the anti-social, destructive, works of the flesh. His point has been that if you will trust in Christ and not depend upon your ability to obey the law, then you will be a moral, loving person and the community of which you are a part will be a moral, loving community.

Now he begins the next section by literally saying, "Brothers, even if a man is caught in a trespass..." The point of the "even if" is that while God wants us to live by the Spirit and the expectation is that we are going to be a moral and loving community, yet we shouldn't be surprised when we see Christians committing sins and the church not acting like a church. To live in the church is to live with people who want to trust Christ and to be like him but who also, sometimes, commit acts of sin of which you will become aware. This passage tells us what we are to do when we become aware that another Christian has sinned. Paul tells us that mutual assistance, not mutual condemnation is the trademark of the church.

### STUDY

1. Compare and contrast how Paul commands us to respond to a "brother caught in some kind of sin" with how he responds to false teachers in Galatians 1:6-9 & 5:12 and those who "live this way" in 5:21.

*Paul, while commanding that we be filled with the Spirit and not fulfill the desire of the flesh, expects that Christians in the church are going to commit acts of sin. The language is quite clear, "caught in some kind of sin," not "caught in a lifestyle of sin." We know from 5:22 that he is not talking about people who are living in sin. He says about those who profess to be Christians but who live in open sin as a way of life with no interest in changing that they are not Christians. Paul is not talking about people who claim to be Christians but who teach false doctrines, like the false teachers in Galatia. He would say about false teachers that they are damned to hell, as he does in 1:6-9. The Scriptures are quite clear that when people who claim to be Christians are teaching false doctrine or when they are living in open and flagrant sin and have no interest in repenting of that sin then we are to excommunicate them from the church. To protect the church and to help them to understand the cost of believing error or living in sin, we treat them as if they are non-Christians. Paul is not talking about that reality in this verse. Paul has something different from church discipline in mind in this verse. He is describing something that happens with regularity in the Christian church. Christians sin and other Christians discover their sin. At any given moment, there are some Christians in our church and in every church who are "caught in a sin".*

2. What does it mean to say that a Christian is "caught in a sin?"

*That word "caught" is important. It doesn't just mean that they got found out but that there is a sense in which they have been trapped by this sin against their will. 5:17 is true for them, they want to do what the Spirit wants them to do but the flesh opposes the Spirit's desires so that they end up not doing what they want. The other word that is important here is the word, "sin" or as some translations have it, "transgression." This is the same word Paul*

uses to describe the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. It is a violation of the revealed will of God as given to us through the Scriptures as fulfilled in Christ. There are a lot of things that we disapprove of in others that are not sin but merely our preferences. This verse does not give us warrant to run around trying to keep everyone in line with the same lifestyle choices we've made. It is not our job to make sure everyone parents like us, eats like us, dresses like us, enjoys the same entertainment as we do, spends money like us, etc. Therefore, before you go to talk with your brother, make sure you are dealing with sin and not your personal lifestyle choices.

### 3. Who should go to the brother caught in a sin?

Notice that Paul addresses the entire church and says that the ones who are spiritual are the ones who are to go. What does that mean? Paul's view is that if you are a Christian you are living by the Spirit, that is, you are spiritual. If you are not a brother who is caught in a sin, then you are a brother who is spiritual. You are trusting in Christ as your Savior and growing in your delight in his salvation. Who should go? Any Christian who knows about the sin of the brother and who is not himself "caught in a sin," is to go. Notice it doesn't say, you elders go and talk to the brother caught in a sin. It doesn't say, you pastor, go talk with the brother caught in a sin. Any of you who are currently living by the Spirit, that is, you are not currently caught in a sin, and you know about your brother who is caught in a sin, you go to your brother and help him.

### 4. What is the purpose of going to the brother caught in a sin? Be sure to consider the main point of the letter to the Galatians.

When we go to our brother we go for the purpose of restoring him. This is a word used for mending fishing nets and for setting broken bones. In other words, we help our brother fix what is broken and return to a state of health. We approach him or her as a person who has a real faith in Christ but who has fulfilled the desire of flesh in an act of sin. He needs to return to trusting in Christ and not serving his flesh, his sinful desires. We don't go to our brother because she ticked us off or because we're trying to be the sin police. We go to our brother because we love him and we want to help him to be and do what he wants to be and do. The only reason to go to a brother caught in a sin is to restore him. We go for his sake. If you have any other motive, you should not go because you are not "spiritual", that is you are not being led by the Spirit.

The restoration we are aiming for is the restoration of faith in Christ. When a person is caught in a sin, they have believed the promises of that sin. We sin because we believe that the pleasure, the "salvation" offered by the sin is better than Christ and his salvation. Therefore, we aim to show the sufficiency and greatness of Christ to our trapped sister, so that she will resist the promises of sin and trust in Christ. We bring to our fallen sibling the promises of the gospel, not the threats of the law. We describe the greatness of being loved by God, of being justified and adopted and saved by Christ. If you are a Christian, you know how to do this because being a Christian is to live by faith. You avoid sin and grow in Christ likeness by trusting in Christ and all he promises to be for you and all you are doing is reminding your brother or sister of something with which you both have experience.

### 5. How is the person who goes, to conduct himself or herself when they go?

There are two things that Paul tells us to do as we go. First, we are to go to our brother in a spirit of gentleness. This is a part of the fruit of the Spirit and is a word that Paul uses to describe Jesus in 2 Corinthians 10:1, "I urge you by the gentleness and kindness of Christ...." Luther describes our going to a fallen sibling like this: "Therefore, if you see any brother cast down and afflicted by occasion of sin which he has committed, run to him and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words and embrace him with motherly arms." We act towards our trapped sibling like a mother acts towards a child that has fallen from her bike, like a dad whose son has hurt himself playing football. We don't come with words of condemnation and judgment. We don't come harshly. We don't yell at them or act as though they are somehow inferior.

The reason we are gentle and humble in our approach is because we have done that final thing that Paul tells us to do. We have examined ourselves first. What is the temptation that faces the spiritual one who goes to help? It is the temptation to feel superior to the one who has fallen. We are tempted to be condemning and judgmental and critical and unforgiving of our fallen brother. We are tempted to approach our fallen sibling apart from the gospel, as if the solution to the problem is to tell them to obey the law. When we present the solution to the problem as obedience to a law, then we are acting as though we live our lives by obeying God's law. "If you'll just obey God the way I do, then you won't sin any more." If we are not currently sinning it is not due to our ability to obey the law but due to

*the Holy Spirit's work of giving us faith in Christ. When we examine ourselves, we see our sin as if it is a plank and we see our brother's sin as if it is a speck of sawdust. When I examine myself I will approach my fallen sibling with the words of Augustine ringing in my ears: "There is no sin which any man has done, but another man may do the same." I know that while I am currently the spiritual one, it is only a matter of time before I will be the one caught in some sin who will need a "spiritual" brother to come help me. I know, as Luther says, "...there is nothing so easy to us as falling."*

**6.** How confident do you feel about your ability to go to a brother caught in a sin to restore him? Why do you feel this way? What would it take for you to be more confident?

**7.** How would you feel if you the brother caught in a sin and were approached by someone like this?

**8.** Verse two is the general principle of which v. 1 is a specific example. What does Paul's referring to a brother caught in a sin as being a brother under a burden tell us about the condition of the brother caught in a sin?

*When a Christian sins, it is a heavy weight that presses down and threatens to crush him or her. If those who are spiritual do not go to the brother caught in a sin, then that sin will crush him and destroy him. Therefore, not going is an act of hatred and contempt for my brother. Isn't the reason we don't go that we think our brother will feel like we are judging him, that we are being unloving? However, Paul is saying here that not going is an unloving act. In the same way that if someone were starving to death, you would provide them with food, so also, when you see a Christian struggling under the burden of sin, then you go to her and help her carry that burden. You help her to remove the burden by pointing her to Christ and seeking to build her trust in Christ.*

**9.** What is the law of Christ? See John 13:34-35 and compare with Galatians 5:13-14.

*The Law of Christ is the law that Christ gave to us. In John 13:34 Jesus says, "A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Paul summed up this law in 5:13-14, "You, my brothers were called to be free. But do not use your freedom*

*to indulge the flesh but through love be slaves to one another. The entire law is fulfilled in a single command, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" The Law of Christ is his command to love one another as he has loved us and thus we fulfill all the laws of the OT as they were intended.*

**10.** How does knowing that you are fulfilling the law of Christ motivate us to go restore our brother caught in a sin?

*The answer is in the command. "Love one another as I have loved you." We are so astonished and overwhelmed and amazed at the fact that Christ loved me by obeying God's law for me and by dying on the cross in my place that I can't wait to exhibit that same love towards others. Christ bore my sins in his body on the cross. Jesus accepts me on the basis of his own life and death and does not condemn me. So I accept my fallen sibling without condemning him. Jesus however, is at work changing me by enabling me to trust him more. He is, through his word, by his Spirit, through his church and through the suffering he brings into my life conforming me to himself. He is working in my life for my eternal joy, which is to be like him. Therefore, I aim to be involved in the life of my brother so that he is changed as well. I am simply seeking to be Christ to him by offering Christ to him and helping him to change into the image of Christ by my gentle, humble restorative work. I love my brother as Christ has loved me and thus I fulfill the law of Christ, which is my highest joy.*

**11.** What is the point of v. 3 and how does it relate to going to my brother caught in a sin? Compare with Luke 18:9-14.

*The point of what Paul says here is that everybody is a nobody and so if someone thinks he is a somebody, he or she is a deceived person. The classic description of a nobody who thinks he is a somebody is found in a parable Jesus told in Luke 18:9-14. The revealing statement by the Pharisee is, "I thank you Lord that I am not like other men." He thought he was a somebody, that he was not a sinner and that he was able to obey God. On the other hand the tax collector knew he was a nobody, he was a sinner. Every person is a nobody in relation to God. We are all sinners. We all love to sin and hate to obey God in ourselves. We delight in evil and prefer the pleasures of sin and of this world to the infinitely greater pleasures of knowing God. God is a nothing and a nobody to us by nature. The thing that will keep you from helping your fallen brother is if you think you are not like other men. If you think of yourself as better than others in any way, then you will never fulfill the law of Christ or bear the burdens of*

*your brothers. You will remain aloof and judgmental and offended by others. You will not put up with the failings of others if you think you are a somebody. You will not obey vv. 1-2 if you think you are a somebody.*

**12.** What are some ways you might know if you think you are a somebody?

*Here are a few signs that you may think you are a somebody. You say things like this, "I would never do that." "I can't understand how anyone could act that way." "There must be something terribly wrong with those people for them to act like that." "I don't deserve to be treated like this."*

**13.** How does someone become a person who thinks of himself or herself as a nobody?

*The gospel is the only antidote to cure your thinking that you are a somebody. The gospel declares, at the beginning that you are a nobody. Christ is the only somebody. He has done what you and I have never done. He loved God and people perfectly throughout his whole life, even when he was suffering. It is easy to say you love God and others when you're not suffering and when everyone is cooperating with your agenda. However, Christ loved God even when God abandoned him upon the cross and Christ loved people, even those who were beating him and driving nails through his hands and feet. He did this for all who trust in him. He is a somebody, for us. The way to think correctly about yourself is to believe the gospel. Then you will realize that you are a nobody whom the King of Kings has chosen to love and to reward with all the glory that is due to his only Son. In other words God will treat you like a somebody, not because you are, but because his son is. You will be able to bear the burdens of others because you know you are a nobody, just like your fallen brother. You will know that your fallen brother needs the same thing you need, to see the glory of being treated like a somebody, not because he is but because Christ is.*

**14.** What's the point of vv. 4-5 and how do they relate to our restoring our brother caught in a sin?

*Whereas v. 3 describes the person who thinks of himself as superior to others, vv. 4-5 address the person who worries about what others will think of him. If the person who thinks he is a somebody won't bear the burden of a brother because he is judgmental of the brother, the person in vv. 4-5*

*won't go to the fallen brother because he is afraid of what that brother will think of him. Verses 4-5 are talking about those who fear what others think. If the opinions of others matter to you, then you won't risk the disapproval that you may receive if you go to a brother who is caught in a sin. How often are we stopped from doing the right thing because we are afraid of what someone else might think? We fear we will be rejected and not listened to if we go to our brother who is caught in a sin. We're afraid someone will think we're just sticking our nose where it doesn't belong.*

*How do vv. 4-5 help us to do the right thing without worrying about what others will think about us? How do these verses deliver us from the fear of men? First of all, Paul commands that each one of us engage in personal self-examination. We are not to be testing what other people think about us but we are to be testing our own motives and actions. We are to be comparing ourselves to the Word of Christ and not to the opinions of others. The question is not, am I living in a way that others will approve of but am I living in a way that God will approve of? Am I being faithful to Christ, no matter what the cost? The second thing Paul reminds us of is that each of us is going to give an answer to God by ourselves. That is the point of v. 5. Each of us will bear our own load means that each of us will have to give an answer to God for what we have done and not done. He's not talking about final salvation, as he has made very clear that people are accepted into heaven only because of what Christ has done. However, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God for what we have done in the body and we will be rewarded in accord with what we have done.*

**15.** Have you been stopped from helping another person because you were afraid of what he or someone else might think of you?

**16.** How would evaluating yourself against God's word and not by the opinions of others help you? How would knowing that you will answer to God alone help you?