

Walking by the Spirit: Building up Others and Sowing to the Spirit

Galatians 5:25-6:10

Pastor James Preus

Trinity Lutheran Church

September 9, 2018

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

6 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.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” These words of St. Paul are directed specifically to pastors, who oversee the household of God, yet they are relevant to all who live by the Spirit. Here Paul speaks of what to do if you see one of your Christian brothers or sisters caught in sin. This is incredibly relevant, because we are all susceptible to sin and fall into temptation from time to time. And it is important for us to notice *how* the apostle directs us to address this recurring problem, “you who are spiritual should *restore* him in a *spirit of gentleness*.”

“Gentleness” is a key word here. *Meekness* is another appropriate translation. Such an approach is not looked at as a winning strategy by the powerful in the world. Those, who are gentle, meek, and humble lose. They don't win in conflicts. And your flesh will agree with the powerful. Your natural inclination when confronted with another's sin likely won't be to be gentle and meek. This certainly isn't the case with many, who are charged to oversee the household of God! “Zeal for your house has consumed me!” is what many sons of thunder are eager to proclaim at the first sight of wrong-doing in the congregation. However, St. Paul warns against vainglory, that is, being ruled by the prideful flesh. He carefully uses the word for

gentleness, because it is a fruit of the Spirit. And there are many good reasons to approach the sins of others with meekness.

First, meekness is an attribute of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. He did not overcome sin and conquer Satan by boasting or snapping reeds and pinching wicks. Rather, with meekness Christ bore the burden of our sin and trusted in God to vindicate him. Jesus dealt compassionately toward sinners, spoke patiently to them, taught them, corrected them, forgave them, and ultimately died for them. And so, when we approach those caught in sin, we should not do it according to our own righteousness, but submitting ourselves to the word of God.

Second, meekness is necessary because of the stated goal. St. Paul does not say that when you see a person caught in sin to seek and destroy. Rather he says to *restore* him. Now, I've worked both on demolition jobs and building projects, and demolition jobs are more fun. They're also a lot easier. But the Holy Spirit doesn't call us to demolish or to win in a conflict. The Holy Spirit calls us to *restore*. This means that your goal is for your erring brother or sister to walk side-by-side with you in the Spirit and bond of peace, not to win an argument or prove yourself a better Christian.

St. Paul gives further reason to practice meekness when he says, "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." There is no sin that your neighbor has committed that is impossible for you also to fall into. It is only by the grace of God that you don't fall into the sins you see in others. And when you examine yourself, you will see that even if you haven't fallen into the same sin as your brother or sister, you have fallen into your own mire enough times. This is why our Lord instructs us to remove the plank from our own eye before we seek to take out the speck in our neighbor's. No, sin still must be addressed, but we have good reason to be cautious as we address it.

We should also take note of the word choice of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul records, "If anyone is caught in any transgression." He speaks as if we're talking about a fly trapped in a spider's web or a child, who has fallen into a pit. Here Paul points out a reality not just about your neighbor, but about you yourself. You are sinner, inclined to sin. We fall daily. The situation Paul instructs us in here concerns not

an unbeliever, but a Christian like any of us. Christians still sin! And Christians should be open to correction from God's Word from a fellow Christian and especially from their pastor, who is called by God to do such a task. And so, pastors (and all Christians), should address the sin in others as they would want others to address their sin. With patience and toward the goal of repentance and forgiveness.

But those, who refuse to be corrected and stubbornly remain in their sins even after correction from God's word are not to be called Christians. This is why sin still must be addressed. Gentleness does not mean that you forgo addressing the sin.

“Bear one another's burden's, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Yes, bear their sins. Sin isn't just an internal thing in the heart. Sin is external and it hurts other people. And God is asking you to bear that which hurts you. That's tough. No one wants to bear slander or disrespect. And it is because sin hurts other people that Christians often react pridefully with the intent to tear down instead of building-up. Yet, the Spirit moves us to be patient, that is, long suffering, bearing the burden of others' sins as we work toward repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. And so, we see that forgiveness isn't cheap. So, it is important to remember that each of us has been forgiven our debt of 10,000 talents and with this in mind we should be willing to bear the small cost of forgiving and bearing with others.

We, as Christians ought to show such patience, because Christ has shown such patience with us and more. How many times in a day has Christ forgiven you? And how many more times will you need to be forgiven? And so, we approach one another as Christians in need of the same forgiveness and patience from Christ. The blood, which has redeemed you from sin and death also redeems your fellow Christian.

“One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.” This Scripture passage, also included in the Table of Duties in Luther's Small Catechism, instructs hearers to take care of their pastor's physical needs. Pastors tend to avoid the topic of giving money in the offering plate, because it is an awkward topic. Pastors don't submit invoices for services rendered. Instead, they live off the offerings freely given by the people of God. And so, pastors often avoid talking about giving to avoid seeming preoccupied with money or setting a stumbling block in the way of the weak. Yet, St. Paul does

bring up the topic a number of times in Scripture and pastors shouldn't ignore the topic completely for a reason that goes far beyond the church finishing the year in the black.

St. Paul writes, "God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 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." St. Paul does not write this only for the pastors' sake, although that certainly is part of it. St. Paul wrote in Philippians 4, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit." He writes this for the sake of the Christian. Why do Christians support the preaching of the Gospel? Because they believe it! They believe that the words of Jesus are the words of eternal life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is worth more than life itself! And why do some not support the preaching of the Gospel when they are able? Because the temptations of the flesh have convinced them that their money is better spent elsewhere. Their flesh has convinced them to sow to the flesh instead of sowing to the Spirit.

When you willingly support the preaching of the Gospel, you confess that you are seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and are confident that God will add the rest to you. It is an exercise of the Spirit, who lives within you. Exercises of the Spirit bear abundant fruit that money cannot buy.

To sow to the Spirit means much more than investing your money in the preaching of the Gospel. It is investing your time, energy, yes, your life in the Gospel. "Whatever one sows, that will he also reap" is such a simple concept. If you sow corn, you're going to harvest corn. If you sow soybeans, you're going to harvest soybeans. If you invest in the desires of your flesh, you are going to reap the reward of the flesh, which ends in death. If you invest in the Spirit, you are going to harvest the reward of the Spirit, which is eternal life.

And this applies doubly to pastors. If in their preaching pastors sow toward the goal of raising money, they'll get riches that perish. If they sow toward temporary peace or bigger crowds, then they might just get it. But none of those things will grant a harvest of saints for the Lord. Yet, what does Scripture say if the preacher sows the true word of God? He'll save both himself and his hearers and the Lord will harvest a crop some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

So, what do you sow? Do you invest more time striving after money or seeking true riches that come from the teachings of Jesus? Do you invest more effort getting your children to all of their sporting events on time or having devotions with them, taking them to church and Sunday School? When you take time to pray and read God's Word, attend Bible Study, speak to your children about Jesus and make sure they learn the Gospel, you are sowing to the Spirit. When you preoccupy all your time and energy on the needs and wants of yourself, you are sowing to the flesh. So, what are you investing in here on earth? In that which perishes or in that which lasts forever? Are you working hard to satisfy the desires of the flesh or is the Holy Spirit moving you to do the will of the Lord? What do you expect to harvest in the end?

Sowing to the Spirit means to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. God wants you to trust in him, so he has given you a sure promise. He promises you that he knows what you need to support this life. He will not let you go cold or hungry or naked. He provides for all living creatures and he has not forgotten about you. And God promises this so that you can focus on sowing toward the kingdom of God and not fear that you will not also reap what you need for your body in this life.

Bearing one another's burdens is tortuous and sowing to the Spirit is impossible unless you already have the Spirit. Unless you believe that God has forgiven the multitude of your sins, you will not be able to bear with and forgive others their sins. And unless you believe God's promise that you will reap eternal life, you will not sow to the Spirit. It is only through faith in the Gospel that these things are possible. So, lest we grow weary in trying to do good, we must constantly return to the Gospel: return to Jesus for forgiveness, teaching, and strengthening in faith. This is how we receive the ability to do good to others, especially those of the household of faith, who have been built up, just as we have been built up, and who will reap the same reward as we reap on the Last Day. Amen.