

Gospel Relationships Gal 5:26-6:6

Tim Anderson 18/8/2019

I nearly cried this week.

That doesn't often happen to me.

I've got mathematician's emotions.

I was talking with one of our playgroup mums.

She and her husband have set up a caravan in their backyard so that her brother has someone to live.

I said to her, 'My hat is off to you.'

I mean isn't that just a really beautiful way of showing love.

And she said to me,

'No. It's not anything special.

He's my brother.

That's just what you do.'

That's what made me nearly tear up.

I mean he's blessed having such a big sister, isn't he?

We've been looking at Paul's letter to the Galatians over the last couple of months.

This is my last sermon from the letter.

Bishop Paul will be finishing off the series next Sunday.

And we've got to the part of the letter that addresses how we live as Christians.

We've heard that the Christian life is faith expressing itself through love.

That was two weeks ago.

But love is a slightly abstract concept.

How are we going to live with faith expressing itself through love?

Well last week we found

that our out of control desires are the biggest obstacle, and the fruit of the Spirit is God's help given to us, so that we can live our lives keeping in step with the Spirit.

Well Paul continues by giving some very helpful direction about how to put that fruit of the Spirit into practice.

And so he addresses the Galatian church,

"Brothers and sisters."

It's easy to pass over.

We know that we refer to fellow Christians as brothers and sisters.

But what does that actually signify?

What do brothers and sisters do for one another?

Well that was where my sister at playgroup was demonstrating to us what it means to love your brother.

'It's not anything special.

He's my brother.

That's just what you do.'

And that's the attitude we should take to our brothers and sisters.

Those gathered here this morning.

And those in England or Nigeria or Burma.

They are our brothers and sisters.

Let's go out of our way to love them.

That's what today's passage is about,
going out of our way to love.

Paul begins 5:26,

"Let us not become conceited,
provoking and envying each other."

Now this is a difficult verse to understand.

But what it tells us is that the way we look at ourselves
will deeply affect the way we treat other people.

If you are all wrapped up in yourself,

that's what being conceited is,

then you won't treat other people well.

Paul gives us two possibilities for how that might happen.

Either we will provoke others or envy them.

Now provoke is not a real flash word to get across the concept.

But I can't think of a better one.

The sense is that we will get all competitive,

trying to show the other person that we are better than they are.

If you are wrapped up in yourself,

then everything is about comparing yourself to others.
Either you will be trying to demonstrate your superiority.
'Provoking' them.
Or you will be wishing you could demonstrate your superiority.
You will be 'envying' them.
This must have been a thing in Paul's day or he wouldn't have written it.
But you can't help thinking it was written for today.
In the world of instagram,
where the whole aim of the game
is to post unrealistically good photos of your own life
to provoke other people to jealousy.
And where teenagers have invented a new word
for demonstrating your superiority.
If you are doing something to show that your are better than someone,
then you are 'flexing' on them.
My muscles are bigger than your muscles.
I'm sure the word must have originated in the gym culture.
Normally I bench press 100 kgs,
but when Fred is watching,
I bench 120 to flex on him.
I know he only does 80.

How are we going to avoid relating to one another like this?
Well the answer is basically to view life as a team sport
where we are all playing on the same team.
You are all my brothers and sisters.
And so because we are family,
we are all on the same team.
If you are doing well,
I celebrate because you are on my team.
If you are having a struggle,
I do what I can to help you out.

What sort of struggles do we have as Christians?
Well the greatest struggle is against sin.

and so 6:1 Paul says,

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin,
you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

But watch yourselves, or you too may be tempted."

When he says 'caught in a sin',

I don't think he means 'Busted. I caught you.'

It's more like caught in a trap.

Sin is a trap.

And it catches people in a deathly grip.

So when someone on our team is caught,
we need to free them from the deathly trap.

That has to be done gently.

Just like an animal caught in a trap,

if you don't treat them with the greatest gentleness,
they will claw at you.

So too a person caught in a trap needs to be treated gently.

The shame and the humiliation at having got themselves caught in the trap
may make them lash out.

But if you do it with the right attitude,
not some kind of 'holier than thou' attitude,
but with an

'I could so easily have been the one caught in the trap' attitude,
then your efforts to restore may be rewarded.

What are you doing when you gently restore someone?

6:2 "Carry each another's burdens,
and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."

If you are thinking about life like an individual,
then if someone else gets caught in a trap that's their problem.

It's nothing to do with you.

But if you are thinking like a member of a family member,
then of course you will help your brother or sister.

They are family.

That's just what you do.

What is the 'law of Christ'?

It's the law of love.

Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

As Paul said in the previous chapter,

"The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:

'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Carrying one another's burdens is about loving one another.

On this Sunday where we are celebrating the work done by the NA group that meets at Holy Trinity, it's worth pausing to observe how their members put this into practice.

How do NA members support one another as they try to get clean and stay clean?

They realise that as individuals

you have very little chance

of beating something as powerful as addiction.

So how can addiction be beaten?

By not tackling it as individuals but as a team.

By bearing one another's burdens.

And so the members give each other their phone numbers.

And they call each other to check they are going OK.

And if you are not going OK,

then you have permission to call someone else up for support, whenever that happens to be.

And if you do stumble,

then they restore you gently.

They know that they have stumbled in the past.

They know they need to watch themselves

lest they come under temptation.

No one is looking down on anyone else,

because they all know that at some point it has got the better of them.

It's hard to think of a better illustration of putting these verses into practice.

The NA group do pretty much exactly what Paul tells the church to do.

And surprise, surprise, their methods have a high success rate.

The success rate from 12 step programs like NA
is as good as from any addiction recovery programs.
Well it shouldn't surprise us that they work,
because they are following the advice that God sets down in his Word.

I guess the challenge for us as a church is
'How do we put this into practice in other areas of life?'
Addiction is a devastating problem.
But as Christians we believe that all sin is an offense to God.
We should take all of it seriously.
It's probably not realistic to set up a dedicated program
to deal with our gossiping,
or our boasting, or putting other people down.
But we ought to be carrying each another's burdens.
If I'm caught in the trap of one of these sins,
then I should be reaching out to you for help.
If you see that I need help,
you should gently restore me,
taking care of yourself.

It's very difficult to run a community like that.
Someone always takes it a step too far
and wants to be a moral police man.
Someone always decides to take the speck out of other people's eyes
while the log is in their own eye.
There's a very high level of relational self awareness required
to restore other people gently.
But that's not to say don't try.
Paul wouldn't have given us these instructions
if he didn't want us to try to put them into practice.
But we do need to be aware of our location.
We live in the most individualistic culture
ever to grace the Lord's good earth.
Thinking that we work together as a team
on matters as close to our hearts as our failures to live well before God,

is going to take some adjusting to.
So we must tread gently.
You can't force someone to let you carry their burden.
They have to give you permission.

What's the greatest danger when restoring someone?
Surely it's pride.

It's just so hard not to put yourself
above the person who is being restored.

6:3 "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not,
they deceive themselves."

When you compare yourself to someone else,
you are always going to misevaluate yourself.

And so 6:4-5

"Each one should rest their own actions.

Then they can take pride in themselves alone,
without comparing themselves to someone else,
for each one should carry their own load."

But is pride always a problem?

You know, the Bible says that pride comes before a fall.

It seems to have a pretty negative view of pride.

But there is a positive sense of the word.

Our teachers used to say to us,

"Take pride in yourselves.

Polish your shoes.

Tuck your shirts in."

And when that pride is not a haughty spirit
but just a commitment to being the best version of yourself,
without comparing yourself to anyone else.

There's nothing wrong with that.

When someone involved in the NA group says,

"I've been clean for 2 years."

That's taking pride in themselves.

They aren't comparing themselves to anyone else.
It's not, "I've been clean for 2 years
and you've only been clean for 3 months
and you've slipped up twice in that time."
That's bad pride.
That's comparing yourself to someone else.
But 'I've been clean for 2 years'.
That's just testing your own actions.
For the last two years I've done better than I did before that.
And praise God for the strength he's given me to do it.
I don't know what struggles anyone else has faced
that have caused them to slip back.
I know what struggles I've faced.
I'm rejoicing in 2 years of being clean.
That's taking pride in yourself.
And giving God the glory for your victories -
which we all must do,
because where else does our strength come from?

What about the contradiction between verse 2 and verse 4?
Verse 2 tells us to 'carry each another's burdens'
Verse 4 tells us 'each one should carry their own load'.
It sounds like the kind of thing
that would get the folks
who say that the Bible is full of contradictions all excited.
But when you think about it,
there's no contradiction.
There never is.
Should we carry each other's burdens?
Absolutely yes.
We need to be a community
not a group of rugged individuals.
We're brothers and sisters.
We're a family.
When someone is caught in the snare of sin,

we help them get free.
That's just what you do.
But does each one need to carry their own load?
Absolutely they do.
It's no good me comparing my performance with yours.
I have been dealt a different set of cards.
I have different life experiences.
I have been gifted with different abilities.
The only thing I'm accountable for
is being the best version of myself.
I have to carry my own load.

And when it comes to judgement day,
I am going to answer for myself before the Lord.
Is he going to ask me,
"Why didn't you preach the gospel message
to crowds like Billy Graham?"
No. He doesn't expect me to be Billy Graham.
He expects me to be Tim Anderson.
But he will ask me,
"Did you preach the gospel faithfully to the people of Hastings?"
That's the job he has given me.
That's my load.
And I need to carry my own load.
And it's a serious responsibility.
Not one to compare with anyone else.
I don't need to measure myself with my mate James at Langwarrin.
Is he getting more people on Sunday than me?
That's not the question.
The question is
'Am I faithfully discharging the responsibilities that God has given me?'

And for you the question is,
'Are you faithfully discharging the responsibilities he has given you?'
In the end that's a matter between you and God.

We work as a team.
We try to help one another to press on following Jesus.
But at the end of the day,
you are the only person who will have to answer for you before God.

That's a sobering thought.
One I think we don't often pause on.
Each one has to carry their own load.
That means you don't have to bear anyone else's load.
But you do have to bear your own.
All of us are going to stand before God.
He is going to ask whether you put your trust in the Lord Jesus.
That is the grounds on which our sins are forgiven
and basis on which we receive the gift of eternal life.
And if you put your trust in Jesus,
there is a follow up question.
How did you do carrying your load?
There are different levels of reward in heaven.
God is going to reward his children.
Not based on whether you did better than the person sitting next to you.
But whether you carried the load that he gave you to carry.
So let's take pride in ourselves.
Not about having your shoes polished and your shirt tucked in.
That's the trivial nonsense of my old school.
But the responsibilities we have to love.
That is a serious responsibility.
Let's love well
and so fulfil the law of Christ.