

## Galatians: Faith Alone in Christ Alone

*Spirit-Led Community (Galatians 5:25-6:5)*

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on August 4, 2024

### Introduction

- ❖ In our study of Galatians, we've seen the Apostle Paul warning believers of the rival teachers that are preaching another gospel and threatening to trip them up – causing them to stumble in the faith. And he's been couching his warnings in athletic imagery – using either the language of running or walking.
  - ▶ If you recall in chapter 5:7, Paul tells the Galatians, “*You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*” You were running a good race – who cut in on you and tripped you up? **His point is that you're not alone in this race of faith.** Sure, there are friendly brothers and sisters running with you – there to spur you on. But there are also rivals on the track. Those who desire to cut in on you. To hinder you and keep you from finishing well.
  
- ❖ It's fortunate that the Summer Olympics is currently taking place because the Games offer us great illustrations. **Paul's warning of opponents trying to hinder you from finishing well was dramatically illustrated in the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens.**
  - ▶ Brazilian marathon runner, Vanderlei de Lima, was in front holding a 30-second lead. He was only seven kilometers away from winning Brazil's first gold medal in the marathon. When out of nowhere, a strangely dressed man broke onto the course, grabbed de Lima and pushed him into the crowd lining the street. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
    - He was a mentally unstable, former Irish priest with a history of disrupting sporting events. Spectators were able to pull the man off and help de Lima back up, but sadly, the disruption cost de Lima his lead and the gold. He wound up winning the bronze. That unfortunate incident just highlights Paul's earlier point of watching out for those who seek to cut in and cut you off.
  
- ❖ But in this morning's text, he maintains the athletic motif but with a different emphasis. In verses immediately prior, he was exhorting his readers to walk by the Spirit (5:16), to be led by him (5:18). And in chapter 5:25, he says to keep in step with the Spirit.
  - ▶ Now it's common for many of us to read those verses with a very individualistic lens. So our idea of a Spirit-led, fruitful Christian life is understood primarily in terms of personal piety and devotion. It's about my own walk with my personal Savior.
    - **But what Paul does in today's passage is to stress the communal nature of our walk.** Again, we're not alone on the track. Yes, there are outsiders threatening to cut in. **But the emphasis here is on the friendly runners by your side. Who are there for you if (and when) you get tripped up.**
  
- ❖ There's another notable Olympic moment that illustrates this point. **During the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, two runners in the women's 5,000-meter event, while almost two-thirds into the race, accidentally tripped each other and both fell onto the track.** The New Zealand runner looked, at first, to have taken the harder fall. As she remained on the track in confusion, the American runner, who collided with her, helped her up and encouraged her saying, “Get up, get up, we have to finish this!” **(SHOW SLIDE)**

- ❖ But after a few steps, the American fell back to the ground again in pain. She had injured her knee or ankle. The New Zealand runner stopped, turned back around, and extended the same kindness. Reaching down and helping the American runner back onto her feet. Staying with her until she was able to maintain a slow but steady pace.
  - ▶ And though they were both far behind the pack with no chance of catching up, **because they operated out of a spirit of mutual care – and not of competition – they both finished the race.** That’s not just a picture of the Olympic spirit. That’s a picture of what the Holy Spirit does within a community of believers.
    - As we work through this brief passage, we’re going to see how a Spirit-led, fruitful community as three characteristics. In such a community, members will be (1) Rejecting our fleshly pride, (2) Bearing each other’s burdens, and (3) Carrying our own load before God.

### Rejecting Our Fleshly Pride

- ❖ Let’s begin with a consideration of that first characteristic. **In a Spirit-led community, believers will be intentional in rejecting our fleshly pride.** I see this in chapter 5:25-26, *“<sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*
  - ▶ Notice how Paul begins with a conditional clause. *“If we live by the Spirit.”* That if-statements forces all readers to self-assess. **If you do believe you’re a Christian – which is what it means to live by the Spirit – then are you keeping in step with him?** Because that’s the expectation. That’s the command.
- ❖ Paul had stressed a similar sentiment back in chapter 3:3 when he rhetorically asked, *“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”* **In other words, you should be living out the Christian life in the same way you started it.** If you became a Christian with complete reliance on the gracious work of the Spirit, then why would you expect to live out the Christian life with a sudden reliance on yourself?
  - ▶ **Remember, the main issue in Galatians is this embrace of legalism pervading the church.** Where Christians were directed to rely on themselves – on their obedience to the works of the Law. The Law of Moses was presented as a means of obtaining (and maintaining) a right relationship with God. It was a message of works-righteousness.
    - And in the previous chapters, Paul has been reminding them of their freedom in Christ. Their freedom from a slavish – and ultimately futile – dependence on the Law and our own ability to keep it.
- ❖ But if we’re not careful to keep in step with the Spirit, we’re at risk of gratifying the flesh. More specifically, of gratifying that works-righteousness mindset. If that happens, then we’re at risk of giving in to our fleshly pride. That’s how v26 connects with all that came before.
  - ▶ **Paul is suggesting that if you encounter a community marked by an atmosphere of conceit and competition – then what you’ll discover right under the surface is a spirit of work-righteousness.** Where members are obsessed with self-glory. Trying to prove themselves in God’s eyes or in the eyes of one another.

- ❖ That word for *conceited* in v26 is the Greek verb *kenodoxoi*. It's a combination of the word for empty (*kenos*) and the word for glory (*doxa*). Literally, to be conceited means to be chasing empty-glory. To desire vain glory.
  - ▶ **The implication is that conceit comes from a place of deep emptiness and insecurity.** Because we lack the glory and honor we desire, we're compelled to seek it out. To prove that we are worthy. That we are deserving of glory and honor.
    - **That's why, when we walk by the flesh, we're so prone to compare with those around us.** If we're better than others in this discipline or that subject; in this sport or that talent; in this role or that ability – we automatically feel better about ourselves. Our egos puff up – but with vain glory.
      - But then when others seem to be better – to be more successful in these pursuits and accomplishments – then we feel devastated. Our egos are deflated of vain glory.
  
- ❖ The net effect on the community is that some of these glory-seekers will end up provoking each other. While others will end up envying each other. Look back at v26. **Those with inflated egos** – who tend to see themselves as better than others – will tend to provoke people. The word for *provoke* means to pick a fight, to challenge someone to a contest. **In other words, their instinct is to see you as a competitor, as an opponent, as a rival.**
  - ▶ In the churches in Galatia, this attitude was exemplified by these Judaizers who were provoking Gentile Christians. They made you feel second class – like you're on the opposing team – until you're willing to adopt their Judaism with all its customs.
    - Now in our context, that attitude is found in anyone who equally puts too much stock in their obedience to God's law. **Those who attribute their spirituality to their rigorous self-discipline.** And who silently judge (sometimes openly) those who can't match their degree of spirituality or discipline. They don't encourage or inspire people. All they do is provoke.
  
- ❖ Now on the flip side, there are **those with deflated egos**. Who tend to feel like others are so much better. And because they struggle with self-contempt, they tend to be envious of others. In the churches of Galatia, this would describe the Gentile Christians who were susceptible to the teaching of the Judaizers. **Who were envious of Jewish Christians.** Wrongly assuming they were closer to God because of their Jewishness. Maybe they thought that Jewish believers can more closely identify with a Jewish Messiah. So they were envious of the marks of Judaism – circumcision in particular.
  - ▶ **In our context, the envious ones who be those who struggle with low esteem.** Who feel defeated. Who never feel good enough. Who carry around a small voice telling them that they don't compare to the other Christians in their church or small group.
  
- ❖ I think what Paul is saying is that no matter if your tendency is to provoke others (because your ego's inflated) or if it's to be envious of others (because your ego's deflated) – **the common problem is your ego. The problem is that you're too absorbed in yourself.** The baseline issue for both sets of people is their fleshly pride. Their conceit.

- ❖ This is such an important observation to make. Because, on one hand, it's easy to recognize the pride of those with inflated egos. **But what's harder to detect is the pride of those with deflated egos.** Who struggle with self-contempt, with a sense of inferiority. They don't appear to be conceited – especially when compared to self-righteous, self-assured provokers.
  - ▶ But that's the problem. We're always comparing. So that even those with low esteem see themselves in competition with others. They just usually see themselves as the losers. Making them susceptible to envy towards those perceived to be the winners.
    - **The point is that even people with low self-esteem are prone to conceit.** Because they're just as self-absorbed as those with big egos. It was C.S. Lewis who said that the humble person isn't the one who thinks less of himself. It's the one who thinks of himself less. Because he cares more about you. And not just what you think about him. He's genuinely concerned for you.
  
- ❖ Friends, regardless of your tendency – whether it's to provoke or to be envious; to have an inflated ego or a deflated one – **the point is to confront your fleshy pride.** And reject it by embracing what God says about you in the gospel.
  - ▶ **The gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians pops holes in inflated egos.** Showing you that you're more sinful than you thought. More enslaved to sin's power than you imagined. Which means nothing you do can ever merit God's acceptance. No amount of obedience can prove yourself worthy of his love. If you truly understand the gospel – it totally undercuts your pride and deflates your ego.
  
- ❖ But then that same gospel goes on to say that – if you put on Christ, if you trust in him – **then you're more loved by God and accepted than you ever thought possible.** Because he covers you with the righteousness of Christ. And sends the Spirit of his Son into your heart – so that you're no longer a slave but a son and an heir to the inheritance of heaven (4:6-7).
  - ▶ The gospel doesn't puff up your ego. **It doesn't boost your self-confidence. But it certainly gives you Christ-confidence.** Your eyes are turned away from yourself and fixed on Jesus. And now that it's no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you – you're no longer empty of glory. You're now filled with the Spirit of Jesus. You're now living by the Spirit, so let's keep in step with him.

### **Bearing Each Other's Burdens**

- ❖ That's the first characteristic of a Spirit-led community – a rejection of our fleshy pride. Here's the second: **In a Spirit-led community, believers will be intentional in bearing each other's burdens.** That's the big difference. If a body of believers are keeping in step with the Spirit – rejecting their fleshy pride – then they'll show genuine concern and care for others. They truly are thinking about you.
  - ▶ Proudful people are also thinking about you. But they're only concerned with what you think – about them! **But a gospel-humbled people are truly concerned for each other and more than willing to bear each other's burdens.**

- ❖ That's what Paul gets into in chapter 6. **He address a scenario where a fellow brother or sister in Christ is caught in any transgression.** Look at v1, "*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.*" This sounds similar to Jesus's teaching in Matthew 18 where he taught us to correct and restore a brother who sinned against you.
  - ▶ Now by addressing, "*you who are spiritual,*" – let's be clear that Paul is not referring to a special class of Christians. He means people with the Spirit in them. And he's been stressing throughout the letter that all believers have the promised Spirit (3:14). So restoring a fellow believer caught in sin is every Christian's responsibility.
  
- ❖ It's important that we see this as an example of bearing one another's burdens. **Correction and restoration are acts of mutual love and care.** And you'll only find this happening on a regular basis in a Spirit-led community where fleshly pride is regularly resisted.
  - ▶ Those who tend to provoke may certainly confront people caught in sin. But they're not trying to correct. There's no intention to restore. And envious people are rarely going to say anything at all because another believer's failure makes them look better or at least feel better about themselves.
  
- ❖ **But the Spirit-led believer cares about you too much to just leave you caught in transgression.** Because they're not operating out of a position of conceit, they can be more compassionate. Acknowledging the battle of desires waging inside you (just as it is in them). So they understand that sometimes you get caught in sin. You sin in ways you hadn't planned. And in ways you ultimately don't want (5:17).
  - ▶ **So they'll be able to correct you and restore you in a spirit of gentleness.** Which, if you recall, is one of the virtues characterizing the fruit of the Spirit (5:23). So a Spirit-led, fruitful person won't approach a fellow believer caught in sin until he's first checked the plank in his own eye. Meaning he'll gently approach in humility. And in compassion. He'll see the individual – not as a wicked sinner – but as a lost or wounded sheep who needs sympathy and support. But, all the while, he's still willing to approach with the firmness of God's Word – speaking truth in love.
  
- ❖ Brothers and sisters, this is how you bear one another's burdens. We're all burdened by this internal struggle with sin. When one of us falters in that battle, we need others to pick us up in a spirit of gentleness.
  - ▶ And if you do that for another, be sure to heed Paul's warning to keep watch over yourself. Acknowledge your frailty and fallibility. **If you don't think you're capable of the same sin, then your conceit will show.** And you'll do more harm than good. Burning that bridge and possibly even hardening that person in their sin.
    - That's why Paul warns in v3, "*For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*" In other words, don't fool yourself into thinking the same couldn't happen to you. **You're not going to serve others well unless you go into those hard conversations with an attitude of "but for the grace of God go I."** Unless you're humble in your approach.

- ❖ Now those who have been involved in this can testify that caring for someone who has fallen into sin takes a lot of time and energy. It's a big emotional investment. You have to be willing to take on that burden. It's why Paul goes on to say in v2, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*"
  - ▶ You can't bear another's burden without getting into their life – with all its messiness. Just picture them weighed down by a burden they're carrying on their shoulders. **If you're going to help them bear that burden – if you're going to help shoulder that same weight – you're going to have to get close.** Right up next to them. But that's how you help them. You make their burden a bit lighter for them – because now you're shouldering some of it. **You're serving them by burdening yourself.**
  
- ❖ And it should be stated that these burdens go beyond our struggles with sin. That's the immediate context. **But fellow believers in our community are shouldering a variety of burdens.** It could be a chronic illness they're suffering with. A mental health issue. A financial burden of debt. A troubled marriage. A relational strain. A season of grief and bereavement. **All of these burdens are heavy and can overwhelm the strongest of us.** We won't make it alone. We need the body of Christ.
  
- ❖ This vision of the church bearing each other's burdens was put on display this past week as so many of you helped lift up our brother, **Matthew Ku**, in prayer. As most of you know, Matt almost died last Monday night. He went out for a run and never returned home. Hours later, the police told his family that a man fitting his description had been admitted to a local hospital. They found him in the ICU on life support.
  - ▶ There they learned that Matt had collapsed during his run, and for some unknown reason, his heart stopped. But by God's grace, he fell in the lawn of a neighbor who knew how to perform life-saving CPR until the paramedics arrived. I'll be honest, he didn't look good on Tuesday when I visited – comatose, on life support.
  
- ❖ But by God's grace, his body and mind began to heal, and by week's end, he's awake, holding conversation, recognizing faces. He's still dealing with short-term memory loss, and they still don't know what caused his heart to fail. So please keep him in your prayers.
  - ▶ But it's the prayers of the saints that I want to highlight. So many of you committed to 24/7 prayer coverage – unceasingly praying for his recovery. And many joined our spontaneous prayer meeting at a church across the street from the hospital. And thankfully, Matthew's parents were able to come over and join us. **It was a beautiful example of bearing the burdens of a family in distress and a brother in need.**
  
- ❖ **Brothers and sisters, this is how we fulfill the law of Christ.** Which Paul explained in chapter 5:14. The law of Christ is the law of love – loving your neighbor as yourself. That's the very law of life that Christ exemplified. **He loved you – he served you – by burdening himself with your sins.** Carrying that heavy burden in the form of a cross.

- ❖ **Since Jesus completely removed your burden of sin, that means you're completely free.** Free from the vain pursuit of empty glory. And now free to fulfill the law of Christ. To help lighten each other's burdens.
  - ▶ **But that will only happen if you're vulnerable enough to share them.** Don't keep your burdens to yourself. Don't fool yourself into thinking you don't need help. And when a brother or sister among us does voice a need – let's make sure it doesn't go unheard. Let's get close, get under it with them, and help lighten that burden.

### **Carrying Our Own Load Before God**

- ❖ That's what Spirit-led communities do. We reject a ruggedly individualistic approach to Christianity and recognize its communal nature. We're in this walk together. And that's one reason why I appreciate being in a Chinese heritage church like ours. Where the collectivist tendencies of an Asian culture pairs well with exhortations to bear one another's burdens.
  - ▶ **But, at the same time, those who operate in a more collectivist culture need to remember that, on the last day, all of us will have to stand as individuals before God.** That means we can't allow a collectivist instincts to keep us from going against the consensus if the Spirit leads us there. There's a Chinese idiom about not wanting to stand out from the community – because nails that stand out get hammered.
- ❖ **But Paul ends this passage with a reminder that, in the end, we will all have to bear our own load. Sometimes we need to be willing to stand out.** To be the only one. Because, in the end, the only One we're ultimately accountable to is God.
  - ▶ Look at vv4-5 and consider the third characteristic of a Spirit-led community: **You'll find believers ready to carry their own load before God.** *"<sup>4</sup>But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup>For each will have to bear his own load."*
- ❖ **So maybe the Spirit of God is leading you to try and restore someone that everyone else considers a hardened sinner – a lost cause.** Or maybe he's leading you to bear the burden of someone that everyone else considers despicable and undeserving of kindness. Maybe you might be criticized for doing that. Many in your community might not like it. **But Paul's point is that, in the end, you've got to give an account before the Lord.** So if he's calling you to it – then what choice do you have? You've got to do it.
- ❖ Now don't misunderstand Paul. When he says in v4 that your reason to boast will be in yourself alone – it would contradict everything he said before if he's suddenly encouraging you to boast in yourself. No, the phrase "his boast will be *in himself alone*" could be translated "his boast will be *with respect to himself alone*."
  - ▶ And the use of the future tense leads commentators to think Paul is thinking about our future judgment. Where we will have to bear our own load before God and give an account. **And Paul's point is that, on that last day, you'll only be responsible for what he's called you alone to do.** You're accountable for your own load.

- ❖ And if the Lord judges your work to be good and honorable because it was conducted in faith – you’re going to boast. **But it won’t be a boast in yourself. But a boast with respect to the fruit that the Spirit himself has borne in you.**
  
- ❖ Now why would Paul suddenly mention our final judgment – the fact that one day we’ll have to carry our own load before God? What’s the connection with what came before? There are a few explanations to consider, but I think one that makes a lot of sense is this – **knowing that each of us has to carry our own load on that final day makes it all the more important and urgent that we bear each other’s burdens on *this* day.**
  - ▶ Since we can’t be with you on that last day. **Because you’ll have to stand before God alone. Then we’re going to stand with you *now*.** We’re going to stand next to you; and get under that heavy burden you’re carrying; and hopefully make it a little lighter. Hopefully it will be a little more bearable for you to walk with the Spirit of God. Until that final day, when you have to go stand before him alone.
    - **But until then, we’re on this journey together.** We’re not racing against each other. We’re not competing. We’re running *together*. Walking *together*. Picking each other up. Spurring each other on. Until we all finish and go before the Lord. That’s what a Spirit-led community does for each other.