

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(August 2, 2009)

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Operation Liberation!

The Ministry of Restoration

(Galatians 5:25--6:5)

Study #13

Introduction: The NWCC repair shop...

If you've ever had your car in a repair shop to get it running right or looking right, you know the kind of expertise required to do the job right!

Repair work is so technical, so difficult that the days of the shade tree mechanic are numbered, if not already mostly gone.

Intensive training is required to become an auto technician. Special tools and special skills are necessary to diagnose and fix the computer driven chariots of the last dozen or so years. And there are so many systems to learn: drive train, ABS braking systems, electronic ignition, fuel injection - and dozens more. Learning the essentials of the mechanics of a late-model car is daunting.

And just as daunting is dealing with the body, with high-tech paint jobs and clear-coat finishes and metal/plastic parts.

You may pay a pretty penny to take your car to the shop, but considering the expertise involved in getting it looking right and running right, it is well worth it.

At a full-service auto repair shop, cars are *mechanically* and *aesthetically* restored to mint condition.

And I want you to keep that image before you as we turn in our Bibles to Galatians today, because the Apostle Paul puts before us the idea that the church of Jesus Christ is to be a full-service repair shop for the hearts and souls of people who have been dented and dinged by life, by bad-choices, by sinful ways, even by others.

As we pursue this line of thinking I want to encourage you to let your mind wander. (Yeah - let it wander while I'm talking...) Picture the lives of people you know and love who have been ravaged by sin. And feel free to daydream about the possibility that the church - OUR church! - might become a church where wounded souls are made whole.

Now, becoming that church will require that we deal with each other in certain ways and that we NOT deal with each other in certain other ways. That is the theme of the preliminary remarks Paul makes to us today.

Walking with the Spirit As We Deal with Each Other (5:25-26)

Living AND Walking with the Spirit

[25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

We have life in Christ by virtue of the work of the Spirit. We enter life in Christ because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He convicts us of our sin, courts us, draws us, shows us the beauty of the cross of Jesus.

And then, after we have placed our faith in Christ, He seals us so that we are safe forever! He is the One who baptizes us and gifts us and fills us.

So much of what is good in our lives is the direct result of the Spirit's work. Because that is so, we should also walk by/keep in step with the Spirit.

As we have seen throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians, walking with the Spirit means that we embrace grace, trust God and live in light of His wonderful promises.

And there is a congregational side to walking with the Spirit, too. Relationally, it means that we will abide by a "non-compete" policy with each other in the church.

No Place for Boasting¹

[26] Let us not become boastful, challenging one another

We all know what boasting means. But the kind of boasting Paul has in mind is the kind that says,

"I have things to offer the Lord that are better than the things you have to offer Him. I can do things for the Lord that are better than the things that you can do for Him!"

Something toxic happens when any of us hold such an attitude. It is poison to the life of the church.

No one is God's irreplaceable, indispensable gift to the church. Not a Pastor. Not the Elders. Not a Ministry Coordinator. Everyone who makes a contribution makes a valuable contribution.

Certainly, not all Christians fill the same function. Some have a more prominent role than others. Some are more behind-the-scenes people.

But the teaching of the New Testament is that all members of the Body are to fill their own unique and vital role in the proper functioning of a church. And there is never cause for a Christian to boast about his or her super-importance.

Paul says that we are also not to *challenge* each other, which is very similar to boasting. But he means something else entirely when he says that we are not to *envy* one another.

No Place for Envy

*[26] Let us not...[envy] one another.*²

¹ Solomon gave some sage advice about boasting in Proverbs 27:2 when he wrote, **"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips."** (Proverbs 27:2)

² Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the New Testament, **The Message**, gives a powerful sense of the essential thoughts of many of Paul's writings. I commend it to you. And, because I think he has done such a wonderful job with our text for this morning, I include it here: *"Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a*

Envy is me saying, *"Man, I sure wish I could do what you can do."* Or, it is you looking at someone else in the church, and wistfully thinking, *"Oh, if I could only do _____ like he can or like she can."*

Envy can concern itself with someone else's influence, their abilities, their giftedness, or their things. Envy appears to be the opposite of boasting - but it isn't.

Envy is actually an offshoot of the sin of faithlessness. The envious person, at some level, doesn't believe that God knew what He was doing when He gave out gifts and abilities. The envious Christian feels that God cheated him.

All of us have to come to the point of realizing that we can't do it all. (The older we get, the more we own that idea!)

It's healthy to be able to say, *"I've got some talent and ability in this arena. I don't have much giftedness in that arena - and I'm sure glad that some of my brothers and sisters are gifted where I'm not!"*

I hope you have become convinced that there are talents and gifts and resources YOU have to offer this fellowship that are unique and powerful and necessary. There is nothing snobbish about admitting that God has gifted you to make a difference.

And, because He has uniquely gifted you in ways He hasn't gifted anyone else, you need not envy anyone else their gift mix!

Keeping that image of a full-service garage going, this is the way the mechanics treat each other in a smooth-running shop.

Paint guys offer something the engine over haulers can't do. Brake system specialists respect the fuel specialists. Suspension experts hand off the engine diagnosis work to the computer guys.

sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original." (**The Message**, 5:25-26)

What each one can do, he does. What they can't do, they pass on to the expert in that field. Each one plays a vital role and each one respects the role played by the others. In short, everybody works together as a team.

Now, imagine our church, filled with people who are each filling a vital role. Each one fulfills a different role - and we all appreciate each other for the strengths that the other has.

No boasting. No envying. Just working together for the common good and cheering each other on. What a powerful, loving picture.

And it all happens when we walk with the Spirit. A sure sign that someone is walking with the Spirit is that he or she is not competing with his brothers and sisters.

What an inviting culture. Acceptance. Appreciation and affirmation. Respect. Humility. That's the church the way Jesus intended for it to run.

And having given us that vision, Paul has set the stage for dealing with the main topic before us today - restoring Christians who have been dinged and dented by life, especially those who have damaged themselves by sin.

Into every auto repair shop will come vehicles that don't run right or that don't look right. That is, after all, why the shop is there. An auto repair shop doesn't exist for the cars in tip-top condition. It is there for the cars in need of repair.

And into every church will come people who are in need of repair, too. Of course, at some level, each of us is in need of repair. We are all in the process of being restored to mint condition by Jesus, the Master Restorer.

But there will be those whom God will bring your way who are in particular need of the restoring work that you have been equipped by God to provide.

Paul says that if a church intends to become a full-service restoration center, it will require some intentional ways of dealing with those in need of restoration.

Walking With the Spirit as We Seek to Restore (vv. 1-5)³

“Some Work Needed” (v. 1a)

Restorations we've known and loved

I've never restored an old car to mint condition. A bunch of years ago, I did have a dream of taking a 1965 Mustang and doing a frame-off restoration. But I really don't have the expertise, time or money for the job.

I have *fixed* a few cars over the years, though. Sometimes, they even run better after I've fixed them. And Kathy and I have been involved in some furniture restoration projects. One of them was memorable...

About thirty years ago, when all of our furniture was the classic style referred to as “early married” we retrieved an old china cabinet from one of Kathy's parent's neighbors in Houston.

We hauled it back to Dallas, where we were then living. It was when we unloaded it that I realized what a nightmare restoring this piece of “furniture” would be.

Taking a good look at it, I saw that at one time it had probably looked decent. But for many, many years before we rescued it, it had sat in the garage, collecting dust, storing paint and other chemicals, and serving as a home for mud daubers and wasps.

I didn't see much hope for the china cabinet. So, after helping with some of the initial cleaning, I left the rest of the work to Kathy.

She saw something in it I didn't see, though. She saw potential. She's always been able to see potential in old, broken-down, ugly, useless things. (☺).

³ See Matthew 18:5-7 for instruction about how to go about dealing with sinning believers after they have refused to repent. In this message, I have not sought to lay out an exhaustive method for how to deal with sinning Christians, nor does Paul. The issue being addressed in this passage is how to initially approach someone who has fallen into sin, and the attitude to maintain with them as we continue to deal with them.

She worked tirelessly on that old china cabinet until the ancient glass front looked great and the old wood shone with a deep luster. She turned something foul into something beautiful - and that china cabinet continues to serve us well, thirty years later.

Maybe you've been involved with the restoration of some old, broken down something - a car, furniture, an old tool, machinery.

If so, you know the loving attention to detail and the patience and the elbow grease and the hours of sweat that were required to bring something of value back to beauty and function after years of neglect and/or abuse.

It has occurred to me that this is exactly what God has done - and is in the process of doing - with every one of us who have placed our faith in Jesus. He is restoring us!

He bought us from the spiritual salvage yard, where we were deteriorating and rusting away because of sin at the price of Jesus' shed blood. He saw value in us. He saw potential.

God saw you and me as "*glorious wrecks*." And from the moment of our salvation until the moment we go home to be with Him in Heaven, He has committed Himself to restoring us to our original mint condition.

He isn't restoring our bodies, but our souls. He is restoring our hearts to beat with His heart, our passions to pulse with holiness, our appetites to be satisfied only with Himself, and our actions to spring from gratitude for all He has done for us.

God is in the restoration business! His garage is full of glorious wrecks that are in the process of being transformed by His grace.

In Galatians 6, Paul lets us in on an amazing truth. The church is to be His full-service garage! He is the Master Mechanic, of course. But he wants to apprentice YOU, who walk with the Spirit, in the grand work of soul restoration.

Today he wants us to picture a Christian coming into the shop - the church; your Care Group; your home. This brother or this sister needs a little work.

When Christians need of a little work...

[6:1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass

Someone has sinned.

It isn't all that hard to picture a believer sinning. It happens. This Christian has violated a biblical command. Maybe he has committed one of the deeds of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Perhaps she has trespassed into territory God has said is out of bounds.

The trespass in question might be an outburst of anger or a bout with the bottle. It might be jealousy or an act of adultery.⁴

Paul begins, ***[1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass...*** what?

Now, quick, how would you finish the sentence?

- **If a man is caught in any trespass**, remain uninvolved because, after all, you would hate to pry.
- **If a man is caught in any trespass**, blast him! After all, who does he think he is, sinning?
- **If a man is caught in any trespass**, let him stew in his own juice. He sinned - he deserves what he gets.

There are countless ways to finish that sentence. Listen to the ending Paul chose.

Seek to restore gently

[6:1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness

⁴ Do we have to assume that the sin in view is a momentary lapse? Could it be a chronic problem? Does Paul assume that such a chronic situation will NOT develop in a healthy church because the members of that Body of believers (where all are walking by the Spirit) will be keeping up with each other to the extent that there is more constant admonition and exhortation? I don't think so, because a healthy church will always be expanding its reach to include those who are NOT walking by the Spirit.

Lives at risk: Handle with care!

When we see that one of our friends has sinned, we are to move. Not away from them. We are to move toward them. And we are to move toward them with gentleness (one of the fruits of the Spirit).

Believers whose hearts beat with God's heart jump into action when they see a fellow member of the family of God caught up in sin. They don't act as a busy body would, talking to others ABOUT the sinning Christian's sin. They talk TO the Christian. But they do so gently.

It's worth emphasizing gently (and I want to do so gently!), because not everyone is inclined to deal gently with people in need of restoration.

The legalist may jump into action, but he is as subtle as a brick and as a gentle as a steamroller. If someone sins, the sinner will hear about it, fast, and with all the gentleness and tact of a 2x4!

At one point in the book of Hebrews, the author tells us that because of the reality of judgment, it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Paul might tell us here, *"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of an angry legalist."*

God forbid that you should be handled by a legalist when you fall into sin. And notice that I said, WHEN, not IF. We all sin and we all will sin. I'm not being fatalistic and negative or pessimistic. I'm being realistic.

When we sin, we will sometimes be observed by someone. And when you sin, I pray that you will fall into the care of someone Paul describes - someone who is gentle - strong, firm, direct, but gentle.

Jesus was amazingly gentle with the most notorious sinners of His day - prostitutes and tax-gatherers. And, like Jesus, the Christian who is keeping in step with the Spirit brings gentleness to the table.

And what is the GOAL, the HOPE of this exercise of the gentleness muscle? It is that the sinning believer will be **restored!**⁵ The goal of involvement is not condemnation, but reclamation!

The GOAL is restoration

The word that my Bible translates here, *restore*, is a fascinating word in the original. In other contexts it is used of an activity that fishermen in the first century engaged in.⁶

As you may know, many of the earliest disciples of Jesus were fishermen who made their living from the Sea of Galilee.

In Matthew 4:21, these fishermen were sitting in their boats after a night of fishing *mending* their nets. The nets had ripped in the previous night's fishing. They had to be mended for the next night's work. That word - *mended* - is the same Greek word that we translate in Galatians 6:1 with *restore*.

In the non-religious world of the first century, if there was something that wasn't functioning according to its intended purpose, it needed to be restored/mended.

Just as the restoration process brings a 1965 Mustang back to usefulness and beauty, or a piece of old furniture back to beauty, so the process of restoration (mending) brings a defective piece of fishing net back to usefulness.

And Paul's idea is that God's people will approach their fallen, struggling brothers and sisters with a desire to see lives mended, restored to beauty, functioning as intended by God.⁷

⁵ Some of the most helpful verses dealing with this kind of "engaged" relating are found in Heb. 10:24-25; 12:15-17.

⁶ A helpful hint when studying the meaning of a word is to look at how that word is used in non-religious contexts. That will often give a clearer sense for what the author means in a religious context.

⁷ Another translation value given to this word is "to make perfect" found in Mt. 21:16; Luke 6:40; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Th. 3:10; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 5:10. That idea seems to fit less with the meaning of Galatians 6, although it is easy to see how it was derived from the literal usage of Matthew 4.

Before engaging in this crucial, exciting ministry, though, a restoring believer needs to take a good, hard, long look in the mirror. He or she must be a certain kind of individual if they would be fit for restoring work. Paul says that they must be *spiritual*.

Fit for a Restoring Ministry (vv. 1b-5)

Am I spiritual? (v. 1)

[1]... you who are spiritual...

It's tough to gauge personal fitness in any arena of life. To the question, "*How are you doing?*" it's sometimes tough to come up with an accurate answer - and it is easy to be self-deceived. Nowhere is self-evaluation trickier or self-deception more likely than in the realm of the spirit.

But, based on what we have seen through five chapters of Galatians, I believe we can answer that question - "*Am I spiritual?*"

It isn't being arrogant or boastful to say, "*Yes, in the way Paul uses the term, I am spiritual.*"

Through five chapters of Galatians, we can say that a spiritual Christian:

- is not somebody who has arrived, but is someone who has learned to have his heart strengthened by grace;
- has lots of room to grow, but is learning to trust God.
- is not perfect by any means, but is motivated by God's promises.

That's Spirituality 101. Being "spiritual" is crucial for anyone seeking eligibility as a soul-restorer.

But spirituality is not the only requirement. Before embarking on a ministry of restoration, you must ask and answer a second question. Are you willing to recognize that you, too, are temptable?

Am I "temptable" here?

[1]... you who are spiritual...each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

I sometimes joke that I can resist anything but temptation. But temptation isn't funny and our enemy isn't kidding around. There is not one of us who is immune to temptation to sin.

One of the ironies of restoration is that the people I am best equipped to serve in a restorative way are the people who struggle in an area where I have struggled. I know what it is to fall where you are falling; therefore I may be in a great position to help you not fall.

The same is true for you. You are perhaps best equipped to help people in an area where you have been challenged.

Restoration is among the most exciting ministries available to us. But restoration is risky business. And wise people will enter into restoration with fear and trembling because they recognize that they are vulnerable to the same sin that has tripped up their fallen brother or sister.

Recognize that there is the danger that in pulling a friend back from the cliff, we might fall ourselves. When trying to help a drowning victim, we run the risk of going down ourselves.

BUT, the possibility that we might fall does not provide us with an excuse to not engage with those who need to be restored!

Restoration is a risky ministry - but then, who ever said that living as a Christian was supposed to be safe?

Paul calls you and me to the ministry of restoration. He just says to be careful. It's dangerous.

So, potential restorers are to be spiritually minded. They are to be cautious. And they are also to be carrying their own load.

Am I carrying my own load?

[2] Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

[3] For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.⁸ [4] But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. [5] For each one shall bear his own load.⁹

So far today we've talked about the ministry of restoration with the vocabulary of "restoring" cars and furniture. I hope it's been a helpful set of pictures.

Another way to talk about restoration is by using the language of burden-bearing. Restoration is all about coming alongside someone who is not able to handle their hurts, their troubling habits and their hang-ups all by themselves. We are called to help them carry their too-heavy burden.

But before the burden-bearing restorer tries to help a struggler lift the *burden* that is dragging him down, the restorer has to ensure that he is personally carrying the *load* that he has been given to bear.¹⁰

The restorer needs to be living a life of integrity before God if he is going to point someone else to a life of integrity before God.

- Who is going to go to a personal trainer who is horribly out of shape and can't do a decent push-up?
- Who is going to get dental care from a dentist whose teeth are yellowed and crooked?

⁸ Paul seems to have made up this word for just this passage (to deceive the mind).

⁹ *"Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived. Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life."*(**The Message**, vv. 1-5)

¹⁰ The Greek words used for "burden" and "load" are two distinct words. "Burden" speaks of a weight that is too heavy for one person to lift. "Load" describes the pack that someone would carry on a journey that contained personal necessities. (articles, Moulton-Milligan)

- Who is going to use a mechanic whose cars never start?

And who is going to get help in walking with Jesus from someone who is not walking with Jesus? Who is going to be able to help someone with cussing who can't control his own tongue? What help will someone be to a person addicted to porn who regularly surfs where he shouldn't surf?

Before we assist someone else with their burden, we have to be sure we are carrying our own load. We can't ignore personal faithfulnesses because of a frantic desire to help strugglers. No. We've got to carry our own load, be faithful to do what God has given us to do.

And we end up seeing that a huge piece of the challenge to ensure that we are effective in the ministry of restoration involves staying vigilant in our own personal lives.

There are plenty of places in Scripture to find some wonderful "how-to's" for restoring. Proverbs, the Gospels, Acts, and elsewhere. But here, in Galatians, Paul dwells on the restorers':

- SPIRITUALITY - Am I grace-, faith-, Gospel- and Spirit-driven?
- GENTLENESS - Am I willing to drop the 2x4?
- SELF-AWARENESS - Am I willing to admit that I could sin in the same way that the one I am seeking to restore has sinned?
- RESPONSIBILITY - Am I carrying my own load, aware that I will stand before the Lord myself one day?

Walking with the Spirit involves taking the risk of reaching out to mend the lives of our fellow Christians. It involves giving ourselves to redemptive relationships.

Conclusion:

"Walking with the Spirit" is intensely practical. It reaches into the day-to-day relationships we sustain with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Walking with the Spirit means that there CAN BE NO boasting/challenging or envying among us. These are "fleshly" activities that destroy the unity of the church Christ died to create.

And walking with the Spirit means that there MUST BE restoration of those who have stumbled into sin.

Just as mended bones are often strongest at the point of fracture, so Christians who are restored by their brothers and sisters will become champions of the faith.

And if we are going to be a full-service heart-and-soul repair shop for Christ it will require a willingness to get our hands dirty, just like Jesus did.

Imagine a vintage era Corvette, rusting in the weeds, engine seized, ugly and useless - but restored to beauty and drivability because of the skill, patience and loving attention to detail of master mechanic.

And imagine a wounded soul, damaged by years of spiritual neglect, bad choices, and life's earthquakes, restored to usefulness and beauty because YOU cared enough to gently restore.