

Spiritual Restoration

January 19, 2020

Galatians 6:1-2

1 My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (NRSV).

Galatians is a letter by the Apostle Paul during a critical moment of the early church. The Apostle Paul founded the churches of Galatia but his foundational work was challenged. There were two types of Christians; the Gentiles who became Christians, and the Jews who became Christians. The Jewish Christians insisted on imposing Jewish laws and customs on the Gentile Christians. The main one being circumcision. This comes from the covenant God made with Abraham as is recorded in Genesis chapter 17.

Paul's doctrine helps to shape our faith today. Paul's doctrine is that the act of circumcision does not make you righteous because Abraham was already declared righteous by his faith. The problem the Apostle Paul saw was one of doctrine so he knows it is necessary to make a stand. Righteousness is not a matter of observance of the Jewish laws and traditions. Righteousness is through God's grace.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes crucifixion. This is much more important than observing Jewish laws and traditions because God's promise and fulfillment is through sacrificial death of Jesus. This marks an end of the old way, the covenant, and observance of law, into a new way, with a new covenant of love and grace. In Galatians chapter 5 Paul teaches that you are not justified by the law. You are led by the Spirit and you live by the Spirit. The Spirit is a spirit of love. When you live by the spirit then you are guided by the principles of love. So, it is not a question of obeying the law; obedience is automatic when you are ruled by the spirit. What is not needed is observing customs and traditions of Jewish faith. These were built on obtaining righteousness by obedience but neglected people, the things that God loves most.

I will frame this in a contemporary perspective. The other day I came across my dad's Hank Williams record collection and I got sentimental because my dad is gone and it brought back some precious memories. When my mom and dad did their estate planning they asked each son "What do you want?" I said "Nothing." The others had requested some things. They came back to me again and said that they wanted to make sure each one of us got something that we wanted. Again I said "Nothing, I don't want anything." Then I said "I just want to see you in heaven." Later on I thought about my dad's Hank Williams record collection. He had the complete set. He had collected each one as it was released. This was his most admired physical possession. I told him that I would take care of it like he does. Out of love and respect for my father I would make sure that what he cherished the most is well cared for.

With God it is the individual human being that is God's most admired creation. God treasures each and every individual. Out of love and respect to God, we are to make sure that what God cherishes the most is well cared for. It is an honor to take care of God's most treasured creation.

This brings us to today's Scripture. I see three lessons on faith formation. One is in regards to what to do when you know about someone who is sinning. The correct response is one of gentleness. Take care of God's treasured creation through love and caring. The goal is one of restoration. God wants the sinner restored. The second faith formation point is that it is you that has received the Spirit. This is what sets you apart from everyone else. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You are responsible for helping to restore others because you have the Holy Spirit.

That is a spirit of love. Your response is love and care because you are the one who has received the Spirit of God. The third faith formation point is a matter of standing firm in faith. Everybody gets tempted. The challenge is to resist temptation. If a friend is in sin you might be tempted to join. But you are called to rescue those that are in sin and restore them. Also, it is easier to resist temptation when you have Christian role models in your life that are resisting similar temptations.

Your responsibility is to stand firm in faith and gently restore someone when you are aware of sin. We are to treat others like Jesus treats them; with love and care, with the Holy Spirit within us. You are to be like Jesus to the world around you. Bear one another's burdens. Be a mentor. Be a Christian coach. Be a friend that others can confide in. Be a person of love and you will fulfill the law of Christ. Lead others to read and study the Bible. Help them obey the word of God. Be an example for others to follow. Be devoted. Spend adequate time in prayer. Build up your faith to where it is stronger than temptation.