

# Watching out for one another in love

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now do turn with me, if you would, to Galatians chapter 5. We're really beginning this evening in chapter 6 and looking at the first few verses.

And what we've reached now is Paul's teaching about the practical nature of walking in the Spirit. But we've had the theology of it there in chapter 5 about walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit. And now he's driving it home in practice.

And really we could sum it up tonight by saying it all comes down to this. Watching out for one another in love. In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ has rescued us from the present evil age and for the new creation.

That's the overarching message that brackets this letter of Galatians. Just look back to chapter 1 verse 4 to remind ourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.

[ 1 : 16 ] Look right to the end of the letter virtually in chapter 6 verse 15. Therefore, Paul says, neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation.

We've been rescued from a world of wrecked relationships because of human pride and conceit. And for a world of restored relationships. Restored relationship with God and therefore with one another. We are united to Christ.

It's one of the great watchwords of Galatians. We are in Christ. And therefore, we are united to one another in love by his grace. That's the amazing scope of the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. But of course, we've already seen, haven't we, that Paul is equally clear. That as yet, our salvation is not fully complete.

[ 2 : 19 ] Chapter 5 verse 6. Despite possessing the Holy Spirit by faith, he says, Through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

For full restoration, which remains still in the future. But of course, it's not just a matter of waiting. We're not just waiting for a future full salvation.

There is a life to be lived now. A life in the Spirit. A life guided by the Spirit. And this life, as he says in chapter 5 verse 6, is the only thing that counts.

And it's faith working through love. Chapter 5 verse 13. Through love. That is the love of Christ who gave himself for me.

Chapter 2 verse 20. Through love. Through that self-sacrificial love. We are to serve one another. You see, the gospel of justification by faith is not just a theory.

[ 3 : 27 ] It's a reality and it has implications. That's been Paul's message all the way through this letter. We're united with Christ in a holy new life in him. And therefore, we have a responsibility to work that out in our personal life.

We have a new life. We are therefore to live that new life. And we're united in Christ to one another in the church.

And therefore, we have a responsibility also to work out that corporate life. We are to live as united to one another. In other words, if I can put it this way, practical ecclesiology, relationships within the church, and personal holiness are inseparable.

They're bound up intimately together all the way through Paul's letter to the Galatians. The life of the church and the life of us as individual Christians.

And that's a very, very important message for us. Always. And what's poor? Paul is equally clear that there will be battles in both of these areas right until the end.

[ 4 : 42 ] Remember in chapter 5, verse 13, he says, Yes, you are called to freedom. You're freed in order to love, but you're also called into a fight.

You're freed in order to fight. It's a struggle to be holy in our personal lives. And it's a struggle to be holy and loving in our church lives.

To be serving one another in love. Always. All the time. That's a struggle, isn't it? I think it is. Don't you find yourself sometimes saying to yourself or to others, I struggle with sin.

It's so hard. It's so hard. And you find yourself sometimes thinking, I struggle sometimes to put up with some of my brothers and sisters in the church.

Or is that only me? Yes, of course you do, says Paul. That's normal. That's the Christian life.

[ 5 : 47 ] It's going to be like that right until the end. So get used to it. The Christian life is a life of struggle. It's a life of conflict. There's a battle right until the end.

But we're not to despair. We're not to say, oh well, might as well give up. What's the point? No. We're called to fight. But not to fail miserably all the time.

Not to make no progress at all. No, we saw that, didn't we? We fight to win. But we also saw that there's only one way to that victory.

And that is to be led by the Spirit of God and to keep in step with Him. Look at chapter 5, verse 16. Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

That's a promise. Remember, we studied that very carefully. It is a promise, of course, but it's not a glib promise. It's not cheap grace.

[ 6 : 45 ] There's no sense of triumphalistic, name it and claim it and have the victory. No. The way of victory and the only way of victory, as we saw this morning in Matthew 17, the way of victory is the way of death.

It's the way of deep, continual repentance. Paul describes it very graphically in verses 24 and 25, doesn't he? Describes it as crucifying the flesh and walking instead in the Spirit.

We have crucified the flesh and we must go on day by day by day crucifying, crucifying, keeping on the cross the life of the flesh.

All those horrible attitudes that we read in verses 19 to 21. All those horrible things must be put to death and kept dead. All those who belong to Christ Jesus, verse 24, have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

You made a decisive stand against the world. You must keep it that way. Day by day, if we live by the Spirit, verse 25, let us also walk, keep in step with the Spirit.

[ 8 : 09 ] That's very challenging, isn't it? It's very searching. It's hard. But you see, Paul is just like the Lord Jesus.

He won't leave us with even an inch of wriggle room. He won't just leave us with the theory and let us wriggle out of the practical implications. No. He wants to nail it down completely.

Like that phrase that lawyers love to use, for the avoidance of all doubt. I was speaking to somebody recently who was a lawyer about contract issues. She said, well, we have to keep putting in this phrase, for the avoidance of all doubt, just so you can't wriggle out of anything.

And that's what these verses at the beginning of chapter 6 are. For the avoidance of all doubt, this is what it means, says Paul. That verse 26, you see, sums up everything that goes before in chapter 5.

That has not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. But it also introduces us to the real life situations in the church that Paul's talking about in chapter 6.

[ 9 : 18 ] Real life, down-to-earth realities about spirit-filled living is the antithesis of that. The antithesis of the reign of conceit, of provocation, of envy.

That's what life in the spirit looks like. Or rather, that's what life in the spirit doesn't look like. And life in the spirit is the opposite. Isn't it John Stott?

The first and greatest evidence of our walking by the spirit, or being filled with the spirit, is not some private mystical experience of our own, but our practical relationships of love with other people.

And since the first fruit of the spirit is love, this is only logical. Oh, if only we would grasp that. Isn't it true that so often we're far, far more interested in those private mystical experiences of our own?

But that's not what the apostle is interested in. He's interested in practical relationships of love within the church. And that's what these verses are all about, practical relationships of love, and the responsibilities for these right relationships in the church.

[ 10 : 36 ] That was the issue at stake in Galatia, wasn't it? There were groups, there were factions, there were cliques, there were people at odds with one another. They were biting and devouring one another, chapter 5, verse 15 tells us.

They were provoking and envying one another, verse 26. Verse 20 tells us there was pride and conceit, there was fits of anger, there was jealousy, there was envy, and things like that in the church.

Was that true only in the first century? You tell me. Do we need to hear this? Well, unless we are all utterly free from conceit and pride, perhaps we do, don't you think?

Are we completely free from anger? Anybody here never been angry with somebody else in the church? Never been envious? Never been put out?

Never been feeling that you've been hard done to? No, of course not. So of course we need this teaching. That's why it's here. That's why the Holy Spirit has preserved it for us.

[ 11 : 45 ] It wasn't just the first century. It's just as true today. And well, says Paul, being filled with the Spirit, Spirit-filled living, means that we have weighty responsibilities, both corporately, to one another, because we're united in Christ, and individually, for ourselves, with our own behavior, because we're united to Christ in a new life.

And these verses at the beginning of chapter 6 make it very clear that these two, the corporate and the individual responsibilities, are intimately connected.

Practical ecclesiology, life in the church, and personal holiness, life on our own, are intimately connected. Tonight, really, we're going to just look at verses 1 and 2, which speaks about the corporate responsibilities that we have for others.

Next time, we'll look at the following verses, which teach us much more to look to ourselves. But tonight, the focus is on our responsibility to God that we have for others.

We're to watch out for others in love. The essence of the Spirit-filled life is that we're to look out for others, and we're to do it, Paul says, in a spirit of gentleness, of mercy, not of judgment.

[ 13 : 01 ] You see that? That's what it means to watch out for one another in love. We find it so hard often, don't we, to be realistic and plain, I suppose, because we live in a world of pretense and spin and self-deception.

But the Bible is just so realistic. It's so down to earth. And the first thing that Paul addresses, very plainly here in verse 1, the first line of verse 1, is that Christians will make a mess of things in life in all kinds of different ways.

Brothers, he says, will be caught in sin. That word there, caught, might mean exposed, as in being found out.

But I think much more likely, we should take it as meaning caught up, or entrapped, or ensnared. And when he says if, he's not speaking about a vague possibility, but he is talking about a virtual certainty.

The Greek construction makes that very clear. The Greek buffs, it's heian with a subjunctive in the protasis. Do you understand that? Take it to yourself.

[ 14 : 11 ] But believe me, what he means here is, almost certainly, this situation is going to arise. Why?

Almost certainly. Well, because we don't yet have our full and final salvation. Chapter 6, verse 9 says, In due season we shall reap eternal life.

We persevere, but not yet, not now. We're still in these bodies of sin. And while we're still in these bodies of sin, living in a sinful world, no matter how faithful we are, no matter how devoted we are to battling sin, there will be times when the enemy's sniper fire hits home.

When it entraps us. When we step on a landmine. When we get caught in a minefield. And even brothers, spirit-filled Christian believers can get tangled up in sin.

Sometimes very, very badly entrapped indeed. Paul is a realist. Friends, we too must be realists. We must realize that we're going to see that in the church.

[ 15 : 30 ] Christians should be the least shockable people in the whole world. It's funny, isn't it, when you talk to somebody who's not a Christian. They tend to think that if you're a Christian, you'll be very shocked about things.

It's the very opposite. Because we know the reality of sin. We know the power of sin. We know the dark personality of sin, don't we?

We know we have an enemy. And brothers and sisters among us will sometimes get trapped in sin. Paul says we must be realistic. We must expect that. And therefore, the second thing that Paul tells us here is that real Christians are restorers.

Not gloaters. Not dammers and judgers. They are healers, not destroyers. They work to restore and to unite the church, not to leave it in self-harm and division.

[ 16 : 33 ] When sin rears its ugly presence, Paul says you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Now he's not talking here about some kind of spiritual elite, you who are spiritual.

He's certainly not talking about clergy as though they were more spiritual. No, absolutely not. All the way through this letter, all the way, he's been hammering on about the truth that all believers in Christ are believers by the Spirit.

And by the Spirit alone. Remember chapter 3, verse 3? You began with the Spirit. It's not a subsequent experience or an advanced state. That's how you begin the Christian life.

Chapter 4, verse 6. You're adopted by the Spirit. It's by the Spirit possessing you that you become a child of God. All the way through chapter 5, he's been telling us that we're led by the Spirit.

We walk by the Spirit. We live by the Spirit. We keep in step with the Spirit. All believers are spiritual. We're possessed by the Holy Spirit.

[ 17 : 44 ] And therefore, says Paul, all believers are to be restorers. That word restore is a wonderfully evocative word.

It's a word used in classical Greek in medical ways to describe the setting in place of a dislocated joint or the knitting together again of a fractured bone by a physician.

It's a word used in classical Greek a surgeon. It's used in the Gospels to describe the disciples sitting and mending their nets as they carefully go through and make sure there's not any holes left so the nets can be put back into a usable condition.

It's used spiritually, therefore, to speak about restoring somebody into their former good state. It's used of God Himself. In Hebrews 11, verse 3, where it talks about the universe being formed, knit together by the command of God so that He might display His glory to the world.

It's used again of the Lord Himself in 1 Peter 5, where it speaks about God after a time of suffering and testing, restoring us, putting us back together to make us strong and steadfast.

[ 19 : 05 ] And Paul says, that's the picture of what we are to do for those who are entrapped, ensnared in sin. It may be willfully at first, but then becoming tangled up and getting deeper and deeper in a mess or become helpless in a trap.

And Paul says, we who are walking in the Spirit are to bring them back. Bring them back into their proper condition. Bring them back into the divine purpose for their life.

And we're to do it with all the skill and the precision of the surgeon knitting a bone and a joint back together again. We're to do it with all the patience of the fisherman meticulously going through every bit of his net to make sure not one hole is left.

We're to do it with all the devotion of God Himself who knit together the whole universe to display His glory and show His love. That's what it means to be a Christian, a restorer, a put-backer together of brokenness where people are entrapped in sin.

That won't happen by accident, will it? That won't happen without commitment, without cost. And notice he says we're to do it, you see, in a spirit of gentleness.

[ 20 : 42 ] That's not something that can be done in a harsh fashion. It's not something that can be done peremptory. Come on, pull yourself together and get back on it. No. It needs gentleness.

One of the marks of the fruit of the Spirit, remember? Not weakness. One commentator says this gentleness is strength under control.

And that's right. And only those who are walking in the Spirit can have the balance to do that. You see that wonderful poise and balance of the Holy Spirit here?

See, so often it's true, isn't it, that when there's sin we're just off balance. Either we leave the person entrapped in their sin to do as they please, either because we don't care, or perhaps we don't think it matters.

Either that or we tend to do the opposite. We become aloof. We become proud and conceited and moralistic and heavy-handed and we just condemn them and damn them. But no, you see, the mark of the Spirit, the mark of walking in balance is that we do neither of those things.

[ 21 : 55 ] We don't just abandon somebody to their sin and ignore them. Nor do we merely disapprove and judge. Both of those things both harms the sinner and will ultimately divide the church.

No, we don't do either of those things. Rather, we aim to restore. And we do it with gentleness. That's serving one another in love.

And that love is Jesus' love. A love that gave in order to restore. A redeeming love.

That's what that love does. That's the nature of his love. True brothers do get trapped in sin and true brothers are to help them out of sin.

Jesus way. There's a picture of that wonderful balance, isn't there, in the Gospels, in John chapter 8. The story of the woman taken in adultery. Remember what the Lord Jesus said when she was surrounded by sanctimonious, condemnatory Pharisees?

[ 23 : 06 ] No, I don't condemn you, he said. But go and sin no more. Neither condemning nor condoning, but restoring suffering.

So friends, we need to ask ourselves that question, don't we? Is that me? Am I that kind of person? Is that my attitude when a brother or a sister falls into sin and is entrapped?

A good question to give yourself a clue to the answer is this. Am I the sort of person that somebody could share their struggles with? Am I the sort of person that somebody could perhaps come to and share with me their struggle, their lapse into sin?

And if not, why is that? Would they be so worried that I would just be down on them like a ton of bricks and condemn them? Well, if so, that's not the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, they may want to tell you, they may want to tell you about what they've done because they think you'll turn a blind eye and that you'll condone what they've done. But no, we do need compassion and realism about sin's power to entrap.

[ 24 : 30 ] But we're not to be soft and sentimental. We're to grasp the nettle, we're to be true, we're to act, we're to act in order to restore. And we're to do it gently.

But what makes you a person like that with the power, with the ability neither to condemn nor to condone but rather to restore? Well, the answer is that true gentleness, true spirituality means the very opposite of naivety, especially about ourselves.

It means that we have a realistic view about ourself and our own sin. Isn't that right? that we know that we're weak. That's why Paul says what he says at the end of verse 1.

Keep watch on yourself lest you be tempted. You see, the spiritual restorer, the gentle restorer, knows that. And that's why they're able to help the sinner. It's so tempting, isn't it?

So, so tempting for us to have the moral outrage of the tabloids. Shock! Horror! Scandal! That's the words on the front pages of the Red Tops, isn't it?

[ 25 : 48 ] A sort of self-righteous outrage. So often it's just full of hypocrisy, isn't it? Did you see that this week about Rebecca Wade, the editor of The Sun? The writer of so many of these outraged, moralistic headlines?

Very interesting. She'd been running a campaign on domestic violence, but this week she was arrested in the police cells because she had been beating her actor husband, the so-called tough man of EastEnders, and the press were having a great time with it.

But it's so easy for us, isn't it, to become like that. Moral outrage. Or to have the kind of rage of the lynch mob that we see against sexual offenders, baying for blood.

or even for us in the church to look down, for example, on the Roman Catholic Church and all the problems that they've had with child abuse cases and priests misbehaving and all that sort of thing. Very tempting for us to have a superior attitude. But you see, the truly spiritual man knows that he too is a sinner, that he too is vulnerable.

[ 27 : 03 ] It doesn't matter how evangelical, how faithful he is. Friends, we must be real. Paul's saying it here, if we're involved with somebody who's entrapped in sin, if that's some sort of sexual thing, we must be realistic.

We too may be tempted. I've been to several clergy conferences where we've had to deal with some of these things, to do with child protection and other things.

One of the things that keeps coming over is this incredible overreaction to the false claims that people sometimes make. And we're told again and again that we must put protection in place to protect ourselves from other people's malicious claims.

But nobody's ever told me that I need to protect myself from myself. And that's what Paul's saying here. You too are weak and can be tempted.

Be careful. people. I'm sad to say that I could tell you about a number of evangelical people in ministry who I know who have got into disaster through this.

[ 28 : 18 ] They've been counseling somebody to do with a marriage problem or a sexual problem or something like that. And it's ended up with them in an adulterous relationship with one of the people.

I could name too many people. And Paul says we must be realistic. We too are made of the same flesh and blood. And if you or I or any of us are involved with helping somebody who's having a difficulty in a relationship or particularly a sexual area, we've got to be careful.

There's a certain sexual thrill that we can find ourselves having by being involved in a situation like that. Yes, we've got to deal with these issues sometimes.

Sometimes we've got to be very open and practical and explicit in dealing with friends, brothers and sisters in Christ.

But we must be careful. It's a minefield. And the true spiritual restorer is no fool. He doesn't fool around with sin.

[ 29 : 28 ] He doesn't take it lightly. He fears sin. And he knows its power in his own heart. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control and gentleness is strength under control.

But you know, in the context here in the light of verse 26, the emphasis I think is particularly not so much on something like sexual sin, but on the sin of pride and conceit, self-righteousness and arrogance in ourselves in reaction to the sins of others.

And that is a great temptation, isn't it? Somebody makes a mess and is in a sinful situation, it's so easy for us to become conceited and proud and feel ourselves above that person and compare ourselves with them.

And Paul says that's just as bad. Indeed, it's probably worse than the offense. It's so easy for us, isn't it, to look down on others in their particular sin, especially if it's not a sin that we're ever tempted to.

So easy, isn't it, to say, well, I've never done that. Gone out and got blind drunk and made a mess of things or committed adultery or all the things that maybe we haven't done but we've seen somebody else do.

[ 30 : 49 ] so easy for us to bolster our self-righteousness and our pride. In the end, you see, it all comes down to whether we've really got a right understanding of grace.

If at heart we are moralistic and self-justifying people, it would be very, very easy for us to become proud and conceited. But if at our heart we've been humbled by the grace of God in Christ, then and only then will we truly rejoice in ministries of restoration.

And not just in crisis situations, all of us all the time are struggling. We're in a battle, aren't we, against aspects of our temperament, maybe of our background, physical weaknesses, whatever it is.

we struggle in our Christian lives and we need the encouragement of family. We need others to help us.

And Paul says you have a responsibility for one another. That's what fellowship is. You are your brother's keeper if you're a member of the Christian church. Mutuality may be disappearing from the world of building societies, but it's the very center of what it means to be in Christ.

[ 32 : 18 ] It's a vital implication of justification. There is no such thing as solo salvation. Justification implies the community of the church and therefore it implies responsibility to serve one another in love.

And that means, as verse 2 tells us, bearing one another's burdens. Bearing burdens is servants' work, work, isn't it? Slaves' work.

And it includes all burdens that we're to bear for one another. Physical burdens, emotional needs, family issues, financial needs, all sorts of things.

But in this context, specifically, Paul is talking about bearing the burdens of other people's sins. sins and the mess that other people's sins causes, the consequences of other people's sins.

And you are to help bear those burdens, says Paul. You have responsibility to one another. This affects us all. Sin destroys things in the family, and the whole family has got to be part of it.

[ 33 : 30 ] We can't opt out. And moreover, he says, it's your destiny as God's people to be like this. This kind of lifestyle is restorative.

It's redemptive. It fulfills, he says, the law of Christ. Remember, we saw in chapter 5, verse 13, that the whole law is fulfilled in love. That all the law and the prophets pointed forward at last to a people who are holy, are people who have God's law written in their hearts by his spirit, whose lives reflect

the heart of God and the holiness of God.

Well, this is what that looks like, Paul says. This is heaven's values visible on earth, in the church. Bearing one another's burdens.

That's how you fulfill the law of Christ, your destiny. But that kind of love is costly. Redeeming love is never cheap. It costs everything.

It costs Jesus Christ everything when he loved me and gave himself for me to redeem me from sin and death. That was the greatest ever display of heaven's values on this earth.

[ 34 : 49 ] The costly love that redeemed us. And we fulfill the law of Christ when we too love one another as he loved us. That's his new commandment, isn't it?

John 13. To love one another as I have loved you. Serving one another in costly ways of sacrifice. Bearing the burdens of one another's sins and mess in order to bring restoration through the gentle grace of Christ that's at work through us as we serve one another.

That's the very opposite, isn't it? The opposite of moralistic condemnation. Puts others down and puffs us up. Commentator Hanson says this, Serving sinners in the church, not separating sinners from the church, is the way to fulfill the law of Christ.

And that's a very fine way of putting it. We are to look out for others in love, with gentleness and mercy, not with judgment and scorn.

We are to live sacrificing ourselves, bearing burdens that are not of our own making, sharing the consequences and the mess of other people's sin, so that we are a healing community, so that we are a place where other brothers and sisters who have got themselves into a mess, who have got themselves out of joints spiritually, dislocated in their discipleship, fractured in their service, so that we are a place where such people can find restoration.

[ 36 : 35 ] Being knit back together, bit by bit, patiently, gently, brought back into their true destiny as brothers and sisters, one with us in the church of Jesus Christ.

as beloved children of the heavenly Father whose deep, deep love sent his Son to die on the cross for them when he loved me and you and he gave himself for us.

We are to watch out for one another in love. That's what it means, says Paul, to walk in the Spirit. That's the mark of a Spirit-filled church. That's the mark of Spirit-filled Christians, not people taken up with their own personal, private, mystical and spiritual experiences, but a people bearing one another's burdens, a community of restoration and redemption.

That's walking in the Spirit. Spirit. So is that us? Is that us in St. George's Drum?

Is that you in your personal life? Very big challenge, isn't it? Don't you feel that? I certainly do.

[ 38 : 05 ] You see, you can't have that in a fellowship. You can't have the spirit of verses 1 and 2 of chapter 6 that we've been talking about here along with the spirit of chapter 5, verse 26, where there's conceit and pride, the rule of the ego, where there's provocation, where there's envy.

You can only have that where we're all committed to crucifying our own flesh with merciless determination. where we're committed together to live for one another, whatever the cost, not demanding our own way, not demanding our own satisfaction, not demanding our own promotion, or demanding of others that they should meet some standard of ours that we feel they haven't come up to.

rather with a strong and with a gentle humility, loving one another and giving ourselves for one another.

glory. But you can't have that where we're full of pride and vain glory. So, brothers and sisters here in our fellowship in this church, don't we want to determine to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, fulfill our destiny as the redeemed and as the redeeming people of God? Isn't that the kind of church that we want to be? Well then, brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught up in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

[ 40 : 05 ] So keep watch on yourselves, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. That's walking in step with the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Whenever we hear your word, O God, we are humbled, humbled by our own sin and weakness and our own pride and conceit and the attitudes of our heart, but also humbled by your great grace which stooped to save people who are proud and conceited and envying and provoking and angry and lustful and idolatrous, you loved us and you gave yourself for us.

May your love, dwelling in our heart by your Holy Spirit, work in us and through us we pray that we too may be redeeming people and drawing others back into their rightful place and serving you as

part of your family.  
We ask it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.