



## *Our Responsibility Toward Each Other*

### **Main Verse:**

"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 also may be tempted.  
Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."  
(Galatians 6:1-2)

### **Main Point:**

How are we to care for each other as we gather as a community of Christ's followers?  
Do we relate with each other as though we are members of a special interest club?  
Or, do we relate with each other as though we are all employees  
in the same hospital or social service agency? The answer is: No!  
Jesus calls us to relate with each in an entirely unique and counter cultural way.  
We are to regard each other as fellow members of God's family.  
This is especially crucial when we see our brother or sister become captive to sin.

**Intro** | Imagine if while we were all gathered for morning tea after church, someone just happen to walk in from the street.

If they didn't know we had just finished our service, we may hear them exclaiming:

"Why, isn't this wonderful! It is just like a social club here!

Hmmm ... is hanging out on a Sunday or Wednesday morning, just like meeting up for coffee and cake at the local RSL or golf club?

Now, we can understand why they may initially assume we're like a club:

- we all share similar beliefs and these lead us to make similar lifestyle choices.
- we do indeed socialise together, while enjoying freshly made coffee and yummy home-baked cake
- and we do sit around and chat about what's happening in our lives.

But if this observant visitor, happened to listen closely to our conversations, they may discern an important difference.

- they may observe two people quietly sitting in the corner, one praying for the other, tears flowing down both their faces.

It would probably lead them to acknowledge:

'Hmm, this group of people is different. The way they care for each other is deeper than any club I've ever visited.

- 'These people let their guard down.'
- 'They don't pretend that all is going well, when its not
- 'They let others see the messiness of their life.'
- 'And they actually accept the offer of a caring ear or a home-cooked meal.'
- 'And when someone they know and trust, sees an area in their life that needs attention, they don't go off in a huff, angry and offended, rather they humbly and graciously listen.

No! We are certainly not a club house – even if the coffee and cake is pretty good!

In many ways we are more like a light house – a brightly glowing household of faith that shines Christ's light in a world covered in darkness.

Why is it important for every one of us to know we are a household of faith, not a clubhouse?

Because the difference doesn't only govern how we meet together for worship, it will also govern how we relate with each other.

And that is the topic Paul addresses in the final chapter of his letter to the believers in Galatia.

Paul applies 'life in the Spirit' to how we relate with each other – especially with those who have fallen into sin.

**Point 1 | Our freedom in Christ, and responsibility to walk in the Spirit, governs how we relate with each other, especially members of God's family. We are responsible to support each other, especially those whom we see captive to sin.**

Let's remember the setting. Imagine a home group, gathered in a courtyard or living room with about 20 all jammed in having decided to follow Jesus as their Lord and God. They came from all walks of life, upper class mixing with slaves, men sitting next to women, children being held still by their mothers.

This type of gathering was completely revolutionary in its day – they were Jesus' newly formed kingdom people showing the world what it was like to live according to the new commandment to "love one another as he had loved them" (John 13:34)

But Paul knows it doesn't take long before these new believers wonder, how do we treat those who fall captive to sin? How are we to regard them?

Do we throw them out, like the Pharisees did to us?

Do we turn a blind eye, ignoring the behaviour?

How are we to treat those who become enslaved again to sin?

So Paul writes,

*"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 also may be tempted."*(Galatians 6:1).

So ... imagine it ... we know that someone in our fellowship here at Southlakes is trapped in a 'sin-infected' situation. What are we to do?

Now, it's easy to let our minds drift to the big, yukky sins like, someone has been caught having an affair with someone else. Or, someone got drunk at the men's dinner and lost their temper!

While the instructions given in the passage would certainly apply to these types of situations. They can also apply to situations like:

- ... someone identifies we are being overly critical and rude to another member,
- ... or we are found to be the cause of a rumour, that is completely false,
- ... or someone tells us that we don't listen very well to how others are feeling,
- ... or someone recognises it is time we forgave someone we are estranged from,

Yeh! They are examples that every single one of us relate to – because we know every single one of us gets caught in these types of sins.

Sin is sin, whether it is unforgiveness, anger, bitterness, gluttony, or sexual immorality.

So, what are we to do when these kinds of situations arise in our community?

Paul gives us instructions on how the Spirit-led community is to respond.

**Point 2 | The spirit-led community are to respond to those caught in sin, with gentleness, mindful of our own vulnerability toward temptation.**

Paul instructs those “who live by the Spirit” and ‘led by the Spirit’ to be the initiator in partnering with him to bring healing and restoration.

For this to happen properly however, the fruit of the Spirit must be clearly operating in their lives.

It is, in fact, the Spirit of God that prompts them to be alarmed and concerned at how damaging the sin is in the life of their brother or sister in Christ.

They can’t just stand by and do nothing. For they know, from their own life, as long as sin remains in our life, it will have a destructive effect on our inner and outward life.

And so, prompted by this concern, the Spirit leads us to want to restore the one we love, so they experience the forgiveness that Christ has made available to us.

But how? How is the process of restoration to be approached?

We are told, our approach must be with great gentleness and wisdom.

It is interesting, the word “restore” was used for setting a broken bone.

If you’ve ever had a broken bone, you know how painful it can be. The work of restoration is usually painful, because it may involve replacing the bandages which cover the wounds, that may not have been properly applied in the first place.

That’s why the work of spiritual restoration must be done *gently*.

But the resetting of broken hearts, and lives, must also be approached *carefully*.

Paul warns us we should be cautious in our attempts to restore our brother or sister, and we do so with an attitude that is aware of our own susceptibility to sin.

**Point 3 | The path of restoration involves allowing the Spirit of God to be the primary surgeon in the work of conviction and healing.**

Now, even as I’m talking about this restoration process, I am vividly aware there’s a real possibility the person ‘caught in sin’ may not believe they have done anything wrong! Nor may they want anyone to draw attention to their indiscretions.

We live in a world where ‘privacy’ and ‘personal boundaries’ trumps almost every attempt to bring healing.

To some degree we all walk around with protective walls around our hearts. We’ve been hurt in the past and don’t want to be hurt again, so we build walls which protect our weakest vulnerabilities.

And when someone identifies our weakness, we can easily feel threatened. It is tempting to react by protecting ourselves from being hurt again.

But, our preparedness to show our vulnerability to each other is exactly what makes Jesus’ household of faith so different from the world.

One of the defining marks of the Spirit-led community is our willingness to get involved with each other’s messy lives and our commitment to foster an attitude which promotes healing and restoration.

But, we must also always remember that the healing process, must never be undertaken without the guidance of the Spirit of God.

We, in fact, do not bring the healing. Rather, we partner with Jesus whose nature is always to bring healing and wholeness to our lives.

However, the Spirit of God is never in a hurry. So, we must not treat people as a fix-it project. Thank God there is only one Saviour – and we are not him!

We do well to remember God's healing and restoring work is usually always a process.

That is why we must never push too fast, or try to speed things up, in an attempt to make the healing process align with our pre-determined timeline.

Rather, we must always give place for the Spirit to move in a person's heart.

So, if we recognise that sin is taking its toll in someone's life, what's our approach?

Firstly, we pray and ask the Spirit of God what our role should be in the matter. It may be that our primary role is to pray for the Spirit of God to convict their heart.

Then, if you share a trusting relationship with the person, and you believe the Spirit of God is prompting you to speak with them, be gentle and humble in your approach.

Finally, if the sin in their life is impacting the entire community, it may be wise to involve me or one of the wardens.

May the Spirit of God so fill our hearts and minds, that each of us will be led to respond to each other with compassion and gentleness, recognising that we are just as vulnerable to fall into behaviour or attitudes that hurt and damage us.