

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(November 25, 2018)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Leaving the Chains Behind**

(Studies in Paul's letter to the Galatians)

### **Walking with the Spirit Into...??**

(Galatians 5:25--6:10)

Study #10

#### **Introduction:** Follow the leader...

Think of a sector of life in 2018 in which leadership isn't important. I bet you can't.

Homes need moms and dads who lead the next generation into maturity. Businesses thrive when leaders lead with bold, market savvy. All branches of our military train men and women to lead with courage and integrity.

Everywhere you look there are conferences and seminars devoted to helping leaders lead better. There are whole leadership networks that exist solely to link leader to leader to leverage skills and influence.

Leadership in the church is a thing, too. Churches and their ministries must be led by men and women of character. God speaks to leaders in the Bible, calling them to lead lovingly and wisely.

I take seriously the importance of leadership. I've been to leadership seminars. I have books on the shelves in my study devoted to leadership, many of them very helpful.

There is no question. No matter what life arena you have in mind, leadership is important. But, as important as it is, for the Christian, followership is more important than leadership.

We all have spheres of influence. We can all lead and can get better at leveraging our leadership for Jesus. However, at the core, we are all - men and women, young and old - followers.

Galatians 5:16 has been our memory verse for the month of November. The Apostle Paul tells us in this verse to "***walk by the Spirit***".<sup>1</sup> I believe that phrase pictures us walking *with* the Spirit as He leads the way forward.

This morning, focusing especially on our relationship with the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us about some of the adventure into which the Spirit will lead us into as we follow Him.

As we have headed in to the home stretch of Galatians, we are seeing examples of the sorts of things we will be doing if we are following the Spirit's lead.

Of course, we will be manifesting the Spirit's fruit - love, joy, peace, and the rest (5:22-23) - and Paul's going to suggest other adventures today. But before going there, he reminds us of the reality and the centrality of the Spirit's presence in our lives.

#### **Living By a "No Compete" Clause (5:25-26)**

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

We live by the Spirit, from day one.

When we believe in Jesus we are "born again" into God's family. It is the Holy Spirit who "re-borns" us. (See Titus 3:4-7) He gives us spiritual life.

The Spirit of God sets us up for a rich life in Jesus. He seals us so that we are safe forever. He baptizes and anoints and fills us.

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<sup>1</sup> The grammatical form of the phrase allows for a translation of "***walk 'by'*** (by His power) or '***with***' (take a walk with the Spirit leading the way) or '***in***' (live in the realm of the Spirit) ***the Spirit***." Given the context, I believe that Paul is inviting us to walk *with* the Spirit as He leads the way.

Our life in God is started, energized, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. So, it makes perfect sense that we who lead in many ways - that's you! - will follow wherever He leads.

First, the Holy Spirit will lead you and me to embrace a "non-compete" clause as we relate to each other. That means, no boasting.

### **No Boasting<sup>2</sup>**

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

We know what boasting looks like. It is to give off the message, in one way or another, *"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."*

Boasting is toxic to life in the church.

Nobody, no matter what role he or she may fill, can ever think that they are God's irreplaceable, indispensable gift to the church.

The beauty of the church is that not all Christians do the same things. Each of us fills our own unique and vital role in the church.

Paul explained the way the church works in his first letter to the Corinthians by using the human body. Ears can't smell, noses can't see, and eyes can't hear. Each body part needs all the other parts to carry out all the functions of the body.

So it is, also, in the church. No boasting. We all do what we can. But Paul means something else entirely when he says that we are not to envy one another.

### **No Envy**

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

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<sup>2</sup> Solomon gave some sage advice about boasting when he wrote, *[Proverbs 27:2] Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.*

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 thinking, *"If only I could work with kids, or lead a project or teach or give or sing or play or ???? like he or she can."*

It looks like envy is the opposite of boasting. It isn't. Envy is what happens when we forsake gratitude.

I'm envious when I don't believe that God gave me the gifts I have. I'm envious when I'm not thankful for the abilities He gave me.

We've all come to the realization that we can't do everything. Nobody is an eye AND an ear AND a nose. It's healthy for us to know our limitations.

But it's also healthy for you to know that you have talents and gifts and resources to offer the church that are unique, 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 anybody else.

When we follow the Spirit's lead, we don't compete with each other. We learn to appreciate the strengths God has given us AND the gifts He has given others.

Next, Paul mentions a second mark of the Christian who is walking by the Spirit. In orienting to this one, let me tell you about a dream I had years ago.

### **Embracing the Ministry of Restoration (6:1-5)**

#### **How to Help a Friend Caught Up in Sin (v. 1a)**

*Restoring to original condition*

My dream was to restore a junked car to its original condition. And not just any car.

I was going to comb the junkyards of San Antonio, look for a mid-60's Ford Mustang, and bring it back to showroom condition.

No, I didn't have the skills necessary to do this restoration. But that didn't impact my dream. I could see the project unfolding. Everything would revert to original.

The ripped front bucket seats would be re-covered and the cracked dashboard refurbished.

The body would be smoothed out, all dents removed. It would be covered with multiple coats of deep white lacquer paint. New chrome, front to back.

The V-8 engine (289, of course) would be balanced and blueprinted, linked to a four-speed manual transmission and brand-new suspension.

Everything will be just the way it was when it rolled off the production line, or better.

That dream will remain, forever, a dream. But what made the dream appealing back in the day was the idea of taking a wreck and restoring its original beauty and function - exactly what God is doing with each one of us who have come to Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

God paid a premium price for us wrecks. It cost Him the death of His Son, Jesus, on the cross. After we put our faith in Jesus, God had us towed away from the spiritual junk yard, where we were rusting away due to sin.

God saw value in us. He saw potential. He saw us as "*glorious wrecks.*"

And from the moment we trust Jesus until the moment we go home to be with Him in heaven, He is committed to restoring us to mint condition.

He's restoring our souls, bumper to bumper. He is restoring our passions to beat fast for holiness, our appetites to be satisfied with service, our actions to spring from gratitude for all He has done for us.

God is in the reclamation business. His garage is full of glorious wrecks that are being transformed into trophies of grace.

And the church - not the building, but life in Jesus, done together - is His garage. He is the Master Mechanic. And He wants to apprentice YOU to join Him in the grand work of soul restoration.

*Identify the sinning brother/sister*

Paul imagines a setting in which someone in the church has sinned. It shouldn't be too hard to picture that. Maybe someone has committed one of the "*deeds of the flesh*" listed in Galatians 5:19-21.

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

Paul begins, **[1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass...** - what? How would you finish the sentence?

- ***Even if anyone is caught in any trespass***, don't get involved. Don't pry. Nobody likes a meddling busybody.
- ***Even if anyone is caught in any trespass***, blast him! Let him have it, both barrels blasting.
- ***Even if anyone is caught in any trespass***, let him stew in his own juice. Let him get what he deserves.

There are lots of ways to finish that sentence. Here's how Paul finishes it.

*Seek to restore gently*

**[1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.**

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<sup>3</sup> Today, I am not laying out a complete model for how to deal with sinning Christians, nor does Paul. (See Matthew 18:5-7 for more instructions along these lines.) The issue Paul addresses 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 lovingly help them.

### Trespassers ahead: Handle with care

This - joining God in the great work of restoration - is one way to live out our church's Mission Statement. Remember, we are here to take next steps with Jesus SO THAT we can help others take their own next steps with Jesus.

Your friend who is caught up in sin has a next step to take. It's an about-face. You may be just the one to help that friend take his next step. And you are to interact with your friend *gently*.

That is NOT what the Pharisee, the legalist, does.

The legalist is concerned to see that rules are obeyed and if the rules aren't obeyed, he's quick with a 2x4 to set things right.

We all sin. That's not being fatalistic. It's being realistic. So, when you sin, pray that you will fall into the care of someone Paul describes - someone who is gentle - strong, but gentle.

And make it your aim to be that strong, gentle presence in the life of your friend who has slipped into sin.

Jesus was stunningly gentle with the people of His day who were notorious sinners. He was always honest and kept that messy tension between truth and grace perfectly.

But He went to their parties and told them stories and came to their defense when legalists attacked.

Like Jesus, the Christian who is following the Spirit's lead brings gentleness to the restoration table. She loves the one she wants to see restored.

The restorer has this vision of the one caught up in sin being restored to beauty and usefulness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the most helpful verses dealing with this kind of "engaged" relating are found in Heb. 10:24-25; 12:15-17.

### The goal of gentleness is restoration

The word we translate here, *restore*, was used to describe an activity that first-century fishermen had to engage in, regularly.<sup>5</sup>

In Matthew 4, several of Jesus' earliest disciples, who were fishermen by trade, were sitting in their boats by the Sea of Galilee after a night of fishing. They were mending (i.e. - *restoring*) their nets.

Over the course of the night's fishing, the nets had suffered rips. The nets needed to be restored, just like Christians who have sinned need to be restored.

Paul's thought is that Christians are to approach their brothers and sisters who have been trapped in the net of sin with the skill of a craftsman and with the heart of a healer.<sup>6</sup>

Following the lead of the Spirit will find you helping those around you take their next steps with Jesus. Sometimes, that will involve helping them fight a battle against sin.

You'll need to ask yourself two reflective questions, though, before engaging in the ministry of restoration. You'll need to look into the mirror and ask yourself, "*Am I spiritual?*"

### **Preparing to Help a Friend Caught Up in Sin (vv. 1b-5)**

*Am I spiritual? (v. 1)*

***[1]...you who are spiritual...[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.***<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> When studying the meaning of a religious word, it is helpful to see how that word is used in non-religious contexts. That usage will often give a clearer sense for what the author means in the religious context.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Paul may have made up this word for just this passage ("to deceive the mind").

***[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.***

“Am I spiritual” is a tough question. Gauging personal spiritual fitness is dicey. It’s easy for me to be self-deceived and to think I’m doing better than I really am.

However, based on what we have seen through five chapters of Galatians, though, I believe we can answer that question, “Am I spiritual?” without falling into arrogance.

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

- He has learned to have his heart strengthened by God’s grace;
- She trusts God - knows she has lots of room to grow in faith;
- She is more tied to heart matters than to rules;
- He is fixed on the cross of Christ as the central theme of his life.

If that’s you, you are half-way on your way to being qualified as a soul-restorer. But, linger at the mirror for another minute and ask yourself a second question, first.

*Am I temptable here?*

***[1]...you who are spiritual...each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.***

None of us is immune to temptation’s pull. Each of us is vulnerable to sin, just as our friend was who has sinned.

Therefore, we move in to restore with fear and trembling. We aren’t above falling, and we know it. We’re alert to temptation, armor up, on guard.

And, we engage.

The possibility that we might fall doesn’t exempt us from the call to render aid.

Restoration is risky. But then, who said that living as a Christian was safe?

You, a disciple of Jesus taking next steps with Jesus, are called to this ministry. And you wonder, “What do I DO? How do I go about it?”

I understand. It’s confusing and complex and tough to know what to do in this or that situation. There’s help available.

There are plenty of places in the Bible to find practical advice and great wisdom for the “how-to’s” of restoring.<sup>8</sup> And there are other great books to read, seminars to attend, even courses to take.

But, isn’t it fascinating that Paul dwells more on the kind of person who is effective in restoring others than he does on technique?

The healing restorer is:

- oriented to grace, faith, the Gospel and the Spirit;
- gentle and willing to drop the 2x4;
- aware that their own sins are every bit as serious as anyone else’s;
- alert to the need to depend on God, lest he/she falls.

The most critical way to ensure that we are effective in the ministry of restoration is to pay attention to who we are. But following the Spirit’s lead means taking the risk to reach out to mend the lives of people we love.

In the last paragraph of this passage, Paul suggests one final path onto which the Spirit will lead us. People who follow the Spirit’s lead are generous.

### **Walking the Way of Generosity (vv. 6-10)**

#### **Sharing with the Teacher (v. 6)**

***[6] The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.<sup>9</sup>***

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<sup>8</sup> I would recommend Proverbs for instruction and the Gospels and the book of Acts for some great stories. In addition, numerous books written by seasoned Christians and skilled counselors are available.

*Christian “sharing” - what fellowship is all about!*

First, there is the application of the generosity theme to the church.

The Greek word for “share” is *koinonia*. It speaks of a close and lasting bond, a partnership.<sup>10</sup>

Here, Paul urges Christians who benefit from the consistent teaching and shepherding ministry of those who labor in the congregation to generously support them in material things.<sup>11</sup>

This is nothing more than the principle of reciprocity.<sup>12</sup>

*The principle of reciprocity*

The church member benefits spiritually from the ministry of a pastor and from other church staff. That church member reciprocates financially.

The financial arrangement between church members and paid staff is a fragile relationship. Money paid to support staff is to be extended in grace and received with gratitude.<sup>13</sup> The enemy of the church would love to exploit that relationship.

It can be poisoned by a pastor’s greed or bitterness, or, through a congregation’s attempts to manipulate through giving or withholding.

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<sup>9</sup> This would have been a foreign concept to the Gentile Galatians.

<sup>10</sup> The root meaning is “to have something in common,” and when the early church in Jerusalem was described as growing together spiritually, temporarily living in a near communal condition, and having impact on greater metropolitan Jerusalem, the word Luke (the author of Acts) used to describe their interaction was “koinonia” (Acts 2:42).

<sup>11</sup> With the chronological context in view, note that a paid teaching and preaching position developed very early in the church (probably even in Acts 6).

<sup>12</sup> The idea of reciprocity is found in several New Testament passages. Jesus says that the “*laborer is worthy of his wages*” (Luke 10:7) and Paul says much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 9.

<sup>13</sup> Note, too, that this is a right which may be respectfully declined, as Paul did.

In the church, as in most every other context, money can leave relationships vulnerable to all sorts of excesses and abuses.

I am glad to say that over the years, Northwest Community Church has been generous when it comes to “sharing” with the staff, and I want to commend you for that.

But sharing “*all good things*” with church staff doesn’t begin to exhaust what Paul has in mind as we turn to verse 10.

**Weighting Benevolence to the Family (v. 10)**

***[10] So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.***

*Especially...*

First, I’ll say a word about “*especially...*”

I thank God for the generosity that has been shown in this church from one member to another.

Families have been rescued from ruin because of the sacrificial gifts given to keep people afloat in times of need.

- The Benevolence Fund has given lots of people here money to keep the lights on and to buy medications.
- The Food Pantry distributes groceries every month to those who are hungry - many of them who are regular attenders here.
- The fixing of cars, the purchase of appliances, and the purchase of necessities is an on-going powerful demonstration of love.

It has been and it continues to be a beautiful thing to watch as you not only love by word, but also by deed and truth. (1 John 3:18)

But Paul also calls us to “*do good to all people.*”

*To all people...*

This is a call to be generous to those outside the church with our resources of money, energy, and time.

When we **“do good to all people”**, we are being salt and light for Jesus in a day when the church of Jesus is increasingly seen as irrelevant, out of touch, selfish, and hateful.

From the very start, Jesus’ church has “done good” outside the church.<sup>14</sup> Not perfectly. But when we are healthy, we Christians have followed the Spirit’s lead by helping the least, the last, and the lost.<sup>15</sup>

I doubt if there is a more *timely* word to a church like ours filled with people like us, than this: Do good to all people.

Not that you can do good to all people. You can’t. But WE can.<sup>16</sup>

God can leverage open doors each of us have to people in need so that, in the end, **“all people”** receive good from us in Jesus’ Name.

YOU help your neighbor with a project he can’t handle.  
 YOU do good to a child by fostering or adoption.  
 YOU assist a needy family member.  
 YOU teach English to someone from a far-away place.  
 YOU show hospitality to a foreign exchange student.  
 YOU join a team here to provide services to residents of the Bristol Apartments next year.  
 YOU lavish value on someone who is living outside.  
 YOU contribute to the Food Pantry and to the Benevolence Fund.

Follow the Spirit and He will lead you to do good to people from all walks of life, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, their sexuality or morals, their politics or religion, their criminal background or their place on the socio-economic scale.

What an impact it would make to people who are skeptical of the Gospel that has changed our lives if we would simply love those who are outside in Jesus’ Name.

There is no end to the good we can do, the help we can provide, the benefits we can offer when we are walking by the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Now, to this point, we have skipped Paul’s words found in the middle of this passage. The time has come to pay attention to what he has to say about sowing, reaping, and a harvest.

### **Conclusion: The Law of the Harvest (vv. 7-9)**

***[7] Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9] Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.***

*Harvests, generally...*

We reap what we sow. That is true in every arena of life.

- The farmer harvests what he sows - and only what he sows.
- Our grades generally reflect the diligence of our study.
- If we don’t service our car’s engine, it won’t run as long as it would if it was cared for.

And what is true on farms and at schools and in cars, is also true in our life with God.

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<sup>14</sup> Our Christian family has built orphanages, hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. It has fought for prison reforms, child labor laws, and the abolition of slavery. Today, it fights euthanasia, infanticide, and abortion. It delivers meals to shut-ins and builds decent homes and provides food for the poor - and more.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there have been embarrassing lapses and even atrocities committed by believers, too. This should only make us more strongly committed to providing a positive example for a watching world of the power of God.

<sup>16</sup> A literal translation of the phrase, **“Let us (plural) work for the good for all.”**

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<sup>17</sup> Yes, we just might become tired in our “good-doing.” We might get “used” by those we are trying to help. We might not be thanked for our service. There might be no reciprocity towards us for the good that we do. So, we might lose heart in doing good. It can be tiring, as Paul well knew. (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). That is why it is so important to keep an eternal perspective as we serve, remembering that we are ultimately serving Him - who knows how to reward His own.

What we *sow* in this life in terms of a pursuit of holiness; what we *sow* as we follow the Spirit; what we *sow* in our loving service here and now, we will reap when we stand in the presence of God.

*Mocking God?*

To doubt this is to turn up our nose at God and mock Him.

To believe, “*What I do in this life doesn’t matter,*” or “*God doesn’t reward those who live for Him*”, is to smirk at the Lord and to doubt His goodness and His justice.

But God will **SURELY** judge the Christian who sows to the flesh and who doesn’t live by grace.

No, that Christian doesn’t get un-saved. But that Christian who doesn’t follow the Spirit’s lead won’t hear, “*Well done*” from God and won’t receive the reward God longs to give when he stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

But God will **SURELY** reward the Christian who invests his or her life in loving service to Christ and to people in His Name.

The Law of the Harvest is an immutable law of God’s universe.

All the New Testament teaches us about the Judgment Seat of Christ and all that Jesus says about receiving great reward in heaven,<sup>19</sup> assures us that faithfulness in this life affects the harvest we will reap in the next life.

*Living for a rich harvest from God!*

And your God wants you to have a rich harvest. Paul makes clear with, **[10] ...while we have opportunity...**, this life is the only chance we will ever have to sow seeds for that bountiful harvest.<sup>20</sup>

So...SOW!!

You sow seeds for a bountiful harvest as you:

- put aside boasting and envy;
- give yourself to restoring glorious wrecks for God;
- live and give generously to shine for Jesus.

The seeds you are sowing right now for Jesus will issue in a harvest beyond your wildest dreams.

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<sup>18</sup> See Philippians 1:3, where Paul says that he lives, “*So that I might win the prize*” See also 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 14 for major passages dealing with the Judgment seat of Christ.

<sup>19</sup> See the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7)

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<sup>20</sup> The poet, Robert Louis Stevenson, didn’t say it any better than Paul, but he said it memorably. When speaking of the Law of the Harvest, Stevenson wrote, “*Everyone, soon or late, sits down to a banquet of consequences.*”