

The New Creation of God

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The Beloved Community Series

Galatians 6:1-5

I want to read to you a letter from a woman who is a member here at Vineyard Columbus. I'm going to call her Dena. Here is what she wrote:

I grew up in a family with four kids. My mom and dad took us to church every Sunday. We sang in the choir and attended Sunday School. My mom started getting sick when I was about 8 years old. Her symptoms started with a limp and then got worse as they do with Multiple Sclerosis. My dad began having me help with the housework. I remember my mom falling and dislocating her shoulder. My dad yelled at us to get out of the room while we waited for the ambulance to get there.

I remember the last day my mom drove a car. She came into the house crying because she had had a bad experience with other drivers yelling at her. I guess she could not see well enough to stay in her lane. I was about 12 years old then.

My dad died suddenly of a heart attack when I was 13. It was a Friday night in February and it was very cold. We had just had pizza for dinner and he thought he had heartburn. He was walking around the living room breathing fast. He finally had me call an ambulance. They arrived and as he left the house I wanted to say, "Bye, Daddy" but the words just choked in my throat. He said, "Take care of your mother for me," as they wheeled him to the ambulance. I guess he died on the way to the hospital.

My grandmother moved closer to our house so that she could stay with my mom during the day when we went to school. My grandmother constantly told us that we were too self-centered because we wanted to be involved in school activities and hang out with friends. She used to leave obituary columns around the house with notes about the importance of doing housework and being home. The threat always loomed that if we didn't act right, Mom would die as a result of our behavior and it would be our fault.

Eventually, my mom was put in a nursing home. Her health kept declining. I had to irrigate her bladder three times a day. My grandmother and I had a huge fight one night when I was invited over to a sleepover and was told I couldn't because no one else could do the irrigation. When I learned how to do the procedure in the hospital which involved inserting a tube in my mother's bladder so that the urine would drain out, I remember running

from the room crying. I told my uncle that I couldn't handle it. He told me to quit crying and get back in there. I was 14 years old.

Our house became out of control with no adults there. Somehow children's services never investigated us. Mom came home and was confined to a wheelchair or her bed. She needed to be fed, bathed, everything. I remember trying hard in high school. I tried to do the right things for mom, but was always afraid of being the one who caused mom's death. I tried to do my homework and have friends. I was in band and orchestra, which I loved, but I only made it through two years of high school before I quit.

I found bars and boys. I had an outlet, an escape in which I received approval and acceptance. As soon as we put my mom to bed at 9:00 p.m., I would head out with my fake ID and drink, dance and hook up. I started having sex when I was 16. My first boyfriend was a total loser, but I needed to have somebody think I was wonderful.

The day I quit high school, my grandmother took me out into the garage and said, "Are you happy? You are killing your mother."

There was something about feeling wanted sexually that gave me the feeling of being approved of in my life, so I went after this feeling furiously. I can't tell you how many people I had sex with in my teens because I really don't know. I don't remember them all. I do know that I had an abortion at age 18. My boyfriends did cocaine, drank, had sex with other women, and lied. One went to jail for stealing a car. Of course, I was attached to him because he was the most addicted and screwed up on them all and only I could see the real person underneath all of that self-destruction.

During all of this I did manage to get my GED and I went to a local college. My mom died the week I graduated from college.

Dena describes more and more self-destructive behavior in her letter – broken relationships, using cocaine, having affairs with married men. Then she wrote this,

A friend of mine told me about the Vineyard Church and I started attending alone. It was really amazing and I would cry during the worship music and picture my parents standing beside me. I felt the presence of God for the very first time there. I went for several weeks and started feeling stronger, but in a weak moment I told my boyfriend about church and he started coming with me. He was a gambler and addicted to pornography and sex clubs. His parents started coming and so did his sister. It was a dream come true. I was able to fix him. My love had changed him.

But I discovered that he hadn't changed. I found out that there was a whole secret life he was living on Myspace.com. He had relationships going with other women. He came to church and received prayer all the while continuing in his sin.

I started attending a grief support group at the Vineyard. I talked about the death of my parents and the loss of my childhood, my innocence and my trust. That really helped me. Then I attended Integrity Women and I received help and grace for all of my sexual brokenness. I also have met the most amazing Christian woman in the church who has really been there for me. I know now that God is true. I'm learning how to trust him. God has blessed me with a church that I love. He has sent me friends to surround me when I need them. He has given me strength to say no to sex. He has forgiven me for all of the pain that I caused to my ex-husband and his children. God has helped to restore my innocence. He has released the chains I was in and he has given me back my soul.

Most of all, through the church, I have learned how to have a relationship with Jesus. He is the one who has given me the acceptance, approval, and love that I was seeking for so long in all the wrong places.

I've been doing a series on the church called The Beloved Community. I've mentioned that that phrase, The Beloved Community, comes from the sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King. He used to talk about his vision for society and it was that of a beloved community – all the alienations, all the things that separate people being broken down, people helping one another, assisting one another, loving one another, caring for one another. Dena could not have gotten well apart from the grace of God that came to her through other people.

Today, I want to talk about this aspect of helping each other, caring for each other, bringing healing to folks like Dena, supporting one another. I've called today's talk, The New Creation of God. Let's pray.

It says in 2 Cor. 5:17.

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2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

We could say this verse applies to Dena, whose story I read at the beginning of this talk. God is remaking her. God is changing her. The old idols, the old cravings, the old way of thinking, the old addictions, the old self is passing away and the new has come to Dena's life. A new relationship with Christ, a new sense of acceptance, a new feeling of being loved, new healthy relationships, a new way of thinking.

Let me ask you a personal question: Could you say about yourself, whatever your background – maybe you had a much healthier upbringing a much less broken past than Dena, but could you say about yourself that 2 Cor. 5.17 applies to my life? I know that I am a new creation. The old in my life is passing away – the old pride, the old bolstering myself by manipulation or lying, the old having to be the center of attention, the old feeling good about myself only if I have a boyfriend, old grudges or bitterness, or sexual brokenness. Can you say about yourself: The old in my life is passing away and I have become new?

This, friend, is what it means to be born again. God wipes the slate clean. We can start over, even as adults, even as people with pasts, we can start over. God gives us another chance. And if you've blown it after coming to Christ, you can come back to Christ. Coming to Christ is not just for those who have never known him. Coming to Christ is something that those who have known him and turned their backs on him can do as well. You can come back to Christ.

But you know, according to the Bible, the new creation is not just something that applies to the individual. New creation also applies to the church community. We read in Col. 3.9-10 these words:

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Col 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Paul applies the term “new creation” to the church in Gal. 6.15-16,

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Gal 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

And then he goes on to call the church the Israel of God. I explained what it meant for the church to be the Israel of God in last week's message, which by the way, all of our messages here are recorded. You can get them on CD in the bookstore. The messages are also online.

New creation applies to the individual. New creation applies to the church. And new creation applies to the universe. The reason why Christ died and rose again from the dead is to usher in a new creation to repair all the brokenness in this world, to relieve all the injustice, to heal this world that believes that the answer to every problem is more violence. That's what this world believes. The answer

to every problem is more violence. If we are strong, then we send in troops and tanks and bombers. If we are weak, we strap a bomb onto our chest, or we smash store windows, or we burn tires in the street, or we riot and throw rocks.

But Jesus died on a cross, rose from the dead, and pours out his Spirit so that the answer to this world's problems is not more violence, but the spread of his kingdom of peace.

You know, here in the Vineyard, we often talk about being kingdom people. We've taught over and over that because we have entered God's kingdom through the born again experience, we can begin right now to enjoy something of future kingdom living. Right now, the believer can begin to experience the presence of the future. The new creation means that right now we could begin to enjoy something of the healing that we will one day fully experience in the kingdom of God. Right now we can begin to experience something of the reconciliation of our relationships that we will fully experience in the kingdom of God. Right now, we can begin to experience something of the freedom that we will fully experience in the kingdom of God.

But you know, Jesus' coming into the world, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension and his pouring out of the Holy Spirit did not only bring something of the future into our present lives, Jesus' coming into the world also brought something of heaven to earth. Jesus brought the future to the present, and Jesus brought heaven to earth.

There is an old hymn titled "This Is My Father's World." I want to read to you one of the stanza's from this old hymn.

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This is my Father's world; O let me ne're forget
That though the wrongs seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world; The battle is not done;
Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven be one.

One day, when the Lord returns, not only will the future completely overlap with the present, but heaven will completely overlap with earth. The distinction between heaven and earth will disappear. I've taught this before, friends. I don't know what you are looking forward to in the future. Most Christians are looking forward to their souls flying off and being with God in heaven. That is what the Bible teaches as sort of an intermediate state - what happens between the time a person dies and the time of Christ's return. Your soul goes to be with God in heaven.

But that is not the final stage and that is not what you should ultimately look forward to. Your ultimate state, if you are a follower of Christ, is that you will exist forever not as a disembodied soul, but in a resurrected new body, living on a renewed earth in which the distinction between earth and heaven has been obliterated.

As I've taught many times, we read in Rev. 21.1-3 these words:

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Rev 21:1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Notice the direction here. We don't go up; heaven comes down. Right now we can begin to experience something of the tearing of the veil between earth and heaven. Sometimes we experience that in worship. Sometimes we experience that as we take communion – heaven comes down. Sometimes we experience that at a wedding – the veil gets ripped a little bit between earth and heaven and heaven comes down.

The overlap of the future and the present, the overlap of heaven and earth, this is what we Christians are taught to pray when we pray the Lord's Prayer. We pray:

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Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So where is the church in all of this business of the overlap of heaven and earth and the overlap of the future and the present? The church is the intersecting point between the present old age and the future new age. The church is the intersecting point between this earth and heaven. The church is the new creation of God. The old has not fully gone; and the new is not fully here. But the old and the new meet in the church.

How do we live out our calling to be the new creation of God, to be this intersecting point between earth and heaven? We care for each other. We accept each other. We welcome each other into the new creation of God. Here is what it says in Gal. 6.1-5,

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Gal 6:1 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. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If any of you think you are something when you are nothing, you deceive yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should test your own actions. Then you can take pride in yourself, without comparing yourself to somebody else, ⁵ for each of you should carry your own load.

One of the men on our staff who helps to oversee our small groups is from Tanzania. His name is Edmond Lyatuu. Edmond was telling me the other day about some of the differences between African and American cultures. He said when he was a child, it wasn't just your parents who would reprimand you if you were getting into trouble. Other adults would intervene, correct you, and rebuke you if you were doing something you weren't supposed to do. And if his parents found out that he was getting into trouble when there were other adults present, they would rebuke the other adults: "Why didn't you do something? You saw my child doing what he wasn't supposed to do. Why haven't you taken responsibility to correct my child?" There is in Africa a strong feeling that they are all part of a community and that the community has the responsibility to raise the children.

In the US it is entirely different. According to a Dutch Corporate Survey I read a few years ago, the US is the most individualistic nation on earth. Most American parents would be highly offended if another adult presumed to correct their children. How dare you intrude on my parental prerogatives?

Is it any wonder that we have so many failures in America – academic, moral, marital, and child raising failures? Why, with all the information that we have, with all the books and tapes, and all the resources that we have, why so much failure? We have a society that essentially communicates to people that you sink or swim based on your own wits and your own abilities.

I believe that the #1 reason why people fail spiritually, the reason why folks make a good start at Christianity, but don't continue on is because our entire way of approaching God is wrong. I believe that individualism, each of us trying to make it alone in our relationship with God without a strong relational tie to others in the church, is the #1 reason why so many people receive Christ as Savior, begin to walk, and then drop out along the way, blow out, or collapse.

The greatest problem facing Christians in America regarding our spiritual growth is individualism. Individualism, trying to go it alone with God without deep Christian relationships, is a greater threat to your spiritual well being than is American consumerism, than is American materialism, than is our entertainment

culture. We need other Christians to begin the Christian life. And we need other Christians to grow in the Christian life.

The Christian life is a shared journey. We are not designed to go it alone. The apostle Paul calls us into

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The new creation Ministry of Restoration

Galatians 6 springs entirely from what the apostle Paul just got done speaking about in Galatians 5. In Galatians 5, Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit and to live by the Spirit. Galatians 5.16 and 25,

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Gal 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Gal 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Spiritual living is all about the way we relate to other Christians. We find the same thought in Ephesians 5.18-19,

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Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,

The apostle Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit. Well, what does the Spirit-filled look like? Ephesians 5.19-21 says this:

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Eph 5:19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The outcome of the Spirit-filled life has to do with the way we speak to one another. See, we often think about being filled with the Spirit, walking with the Spirit, living by the Spirit as simply some kind of private mystical experience. "I

felt something when the Holy Spirit came.” You will often feel something when the Holy Spirit comes with power, but the apostle Paul is emphasizing that the practical fruit of the Holy Spirit’s coming has to do with the way that you relate to other Christians.

Galatians 6:1 reads:

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Gal 6:1 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.

The apostle Paul is telling us that being restored when we are trapped in a sin is something that we probably won’t get directly from God. God, instead, is going to use other people to set us free. The apostle Paul is saying that our relationships with one another are not a spiritual luxury, for those who can afford it. Deep relationship with other Christians, in the context of a group, is a necessity. You simply will never be able to fulfill God’s purpose for your life unless you have deep, continuing, ongoing relationship with other believers.

The Bible, from beginning to end, tells us that we do not do well alone. One of the first things that God said to Adam in the Garden was, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Adam didn’t respond, “Hey, me and you are sufficient by ourselves.” God said we couldn’t fulfill his purpose in our lives in isolation. You cannot simply be American individualists and live well.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 reads:

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Ecc 4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:

Have you ever been in a situation where you have fallen and have had no one to help you up? Have any of you ever been, or are you now so isolated, so alone, that there was no one around to help you when you were wrapped up and enslaved by a destructive habit?

What is Galatians 6:1 talking about? He says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin,” the issue is that a Christian, a genuine follower of Christ, someone who has received Christ into their lives as their Lord and Savior, who is trapped. Paul is speaking about a Christian who has been taken hostage by some particular habit.

Perhaps you overeat when you are depressed or angry. You regularly commit the sin of gluttony. Or you struggle repeatedly with explosive anger, even though

you are a Christian. You scream, slam doors, and punch walls. You've broken things. You've had a number of meltdowns. Maybe you curse and use really foul speech when you are upset. Perhaps you've gone so far as to physically hurt another person – your spouse, your child – you've pushed or hit them. If someone recorded you during one of your rants and played it back to you when you calmed down, would you sound to yourself like a psychotic mental patient?

Maybe you are trapped by an eating disorder. You regularly purge yourself after eating, or you are starving yourself. Maybe your trap is the trap of pornography and you regularly view pornography. Or you continue to practice sex outside of marriage. Or you are trapped in homosexual sex or homosexual fantasies.

If you are a follower of Christ and you are trapped by a sin, I can guarantee you that you are not happy with your sin. You cannot have the Holy Spirit in you and happily sin for long. Here's the way it works. Before you come to Christ, you can be happy and sin. I was a happy pagan. I didn't think twice about sinning. I didn't lose any sleep over my sin. I wasn't particularly bothered by my speech patterns, or my lovelessness, or my partying.

But something happened to me when I came to Christ, and the same thing happened to many of you – the Holy Spirit, in whom there is no sin, entered my life and the Holy Spirit, in whom there is no sin, enters the life of everyone of you who has become a follower of Christ. And God's Spirit in you is at war with our sin. He hates sin and he will continue to combat sin in our lives. A Christian can never peacefully and happily sin. The Christian can sin, but not peacefully or happily so. Conversely, if you can sin and still be happy, you have either thrown your conscience overboard or you are not yet a Christian. Christians who sin will experience internal tension, a war in their souls.

Let me offer you a graphic.

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Addictive Behavior

False Thinking – This will make me happy



Leading to Compulsive Behavior



Leading to Guilt and Shame



Leading to Despair



Leading back to False Thinking: This will make me happy.

Thoughts like “Chocolate will make me happy. Sex will make me happy. Work will make me happy. TV will make me happy. Gambling will make me happy. A relationship with a guy or girl will make me happy.” Being needed even by a total loser will make me happy.

We believe those lies and we engage in a certain compulsive behavior. We lose our will power. After we’ve engaged in the behavior or in a relationship, if you are a Christian, you will certainly experience guilt and shame. And because you know you are offending God and living outside his will for your life, you will probably despair. You will beat yourself up, “I can’t believe I did this again. I’m a worthless person. I’m probably not really a Christian.” And this despair and discouragement will lead you right back into the false thinking; I need this thing in order to make myself happy. And the noose will tighten around your neck.

How do you break this cycle of misery? You can’t do it alone. American individualism will absolutely fail you at this point. You cannot pick yourself up by your own hair, or lift yourself up by your own bootstraps. Like Dena, when you are trapped, when you are involved in a compulsive behavior, when you are what therapists call “addicted” you almost certainly will not be able to get free even with God’s help, apart from other people. Hardly anyone ever recovers from an addiction or a compulsive behavior apart from deep connection to a support network.

Psychologist Henry Cloud, in his book *How People Grow*, says this, “Some may stop their addictive or compulsive behaviors apart from other people, but if their relational patterns do not change, they will relapse if they are not involved in a group.”

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Gal 6:1 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.

The word for “restore” is used in the secular Greek for setting a fractured, or dislocated bone. A bone is broken and another person restores it. They straighten it out. The word was also used of the apostles when they were

mending their nets at the end of a long fishing trip. They dragged in their nets, cleaned them, and where the nets were torn, they mended them, or restored them. This is what the apostle Paul is saying.

The goal that Jesus Christ has for each of us is real freedom, liberation from enslaving habits that fracture us. Jesus wants to remove from our lives things that tear us or shred us. His goal is freedom. That's why I died, to set you free. But we have a role in each other's lives in helping to restore the gift of freedom.

Now, there are, of course, other alternatives in trying to restore someone who is trapped in a sin. We could gossip about the person. Let everyone who knows them learn about the sin. We could judge them in our hearts. "Well, they've had problems for a long time. They deserve whatever pain they are now experiencing." We could tell the pastors about their problems and let professional Christians deal with it.

But probably the chief alternative we choose when we learn about someone who is trapped in some problem or sin is that we choose to do nothing. Isn't that the main way we deal with other people's problems? We choose to do nothing. That's what American individualism teaches us. "Hey, it's none of my business what anyone else does. If he wants to get a divorce and take up with a new model, that's his business." "If she wants to overeat and wreck her health, that's none of my concern. To each his own." "I'm personally opposed to abortions, but I'm certainly not going to talk with someone else about their choice to abort." If someone is sleeping around or using drugs, or piling up debt, or struggling with an eating disorder, that's their business.

The idea that something that is ruining another person's life is none of my business is as old as humanity itself. One of the first statements in the Bible made by any person is the statement by Cain in response to God's question in Gen. 4.9,

SLIDE

Ge 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Be honest, friends, how often have you become aware of a situation not just involving some distant acquaintance, but involving a friend, someone you have a relationship with, someone you have history with, a person you have equity with. You become aware of their situation, you become aware of their problem, but you choose to rationalize away your responsibility. How often do you do that? How often do you say, "I've got so much going on in my life right now, I can't get involved with her or with him." Maybe you do have a lot going on, but you are your brother's and your sister's keeper.

But you know they won't respond. If I talk with them about their particular issue, it will just upset them. That's why the apostle Paul tells us in Gal. 6.1 to approach them with the spirit of gentleness, with meekness.

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Gal 6:1 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.

Gentleness is the way that those who have power always need to approach those who don't have power. Gentleness, meekness, is the primary attribute that must be developed in bosses towards their employees. Gentleness, meekness, is the primary attribute that must be developed in parents towards their children. Gentleness, meekness, is the primary attribute that those who are attempting to restore someone must develop in approaching someone who is trapped in a sin, particularly if the discussion of that sin is going to produce shame in the individual.

But you say, "Who am I? I've got my own problems." That you are not perfect is assumed by the apostle Paul in Gal. 6.1 when he says:

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Gal 6:1 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.

John Calvin, the great Protestant Reformer and author of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, used to say that:

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Sin is a sign on your back that everyone else can read, but you.

When we approach someone else, we come painfully aware of the fact that we have a sign on our own backs, a sign that the devil can certainly read. We go in this ministry of restoration in humility, deeply aware of our

own problems and our own weaknesses. And yet, the Bible commands us to go.

But someone else will surely go. Someone else is closer to this person than I am.

The apostle Paul says:

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Gal 6:1 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.

You go.

Let me make this personal for you. How many of you are aware of a person who used to be a follower of Christ, maybe they used to be in this congregation, maybe they used to be in Christian leadership, but they've walked away from Christ. They've walked away from the church. Do you know anyone who has walked away from Christ? Do you know anyone who has walked away from the church? Any friends with whom you have relational equity? Do you know anyone who has walked away from their marriage? Walked away from your small group? Do you know anyone who is trapped in a sin?

Friend, are you obeying Gal. 6.1? Are you, by God's grace, attempting to be involved in this new creation ministry of restoration?

So, how do I do that? There is a movie out now called *The Guardian* about the Coast Guard. I saw previews of this really cool scene where people are stranded out in a boat at sea during a huge storm. You've got the Coast Guard helicopter flying in, barely staying aloft above the 15' waves and howling waves. Then you see a couple of Coast Guard divers jump into the water, rescuing the folks who are adrift in the water.

Well, that is the ministry that Paul is urging upon us. There is a fantastic chapter in the Bible that is all about rescue and restoration. It is Matthew 18. I would like you to turn there quickly.

SLIDE

Mt 18:10 [11]“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹² “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?

¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Jesus talks about this ministry of rescue and restoration. He offers the parable of the lost sheep. Often in a very different context in Luke 15 and we assume that it is talking about evangelism because it uses the word “lost.” Most people think that is it talking about seeking and saving those who have not placed their trust in Jesus for salvation.

But that is probably not what Jesus is talking about in this context. He is talking about relationships within the kingdom. He is talking in this chapter about people who are part of the family of God. He is talking about the desire of the Good Shepherd to rescue and restore those who have been overtaken in sin.

And then he tells us the means by which the Good Shepherd sends out his people in the storms and waves to affect that rescue and restoration. That is in Matt. 18.15-17,

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Mt 18:15 “If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

According to verse 15 we go and initiate a personal private discussion with the individual. And then the process slowly includes others, if the person confronted is unwilling to turn and repent.

But church discipline is not just a matter of punishment, it is a way of restoring people. We go and we try to rescue folks. We do not say along with Cain, “Well, am I my brother’s keeper? It is not my business.”

I want to share with you a brief video of rescue and restoration.

VIDEO

You know, we have so many groups here designed for rescue and restoration. We have a group titled:

- Hurts, Habits and Hangups – dealing with relationship issues, overeating and spending.
- Substance Abuse Groups
- Smoking Cessation Groups
- Sexual Issues involving addictions
- Weight Loss groups

One woman in our church who has overcome her own addictions now leads a group titled: The Fix. The Fix is a Joshua House group led by Tracy Merrill. It began in July 2005 with just two people (the leaders) sitting and staring at one another. It has grown over this last year and 30 people have come through the group. Through the group, 5 people came off Crack Cocaine, 4 people have been freed from alcoholism, at least 5 people have come to the Lord, and at 2 have been baptized.

Paul goes on to say in Gal. 6:2,

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Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Here he is talking about the second new creation ministry of the church:

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The Ministry Of Burden Bearing

What does the Bible mean by "burdens." Certainly, the burdens could be the sins mentioned in v. 1,

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Gal 6:1 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.

But burdens has a wider scope than that. It likely includes all the problems we experience as the result of living in a fallen world. Burdens could include getting cancer, or having a loved one get cancer. Someone may have a sick child or a child with a disability like autism, or Asberger's.

Your burden may be the fact that you were a victim of rape or incest or molestation as a child. Your burden may be that you are going through a divorce or are separated, or you've been betrayed by your spouse. Perhaps you are suffering the emotional, psychological, or physical aftermath of having an abortion.

Or it could be something internal, not external circumstances, but for you it is internal. You struggle with depression that you can't shake, or grief that overwhelms you, or the inability to conceive a child.

Lots of times, concerning our burdens we think, "Well, I don't want to be a bother to anyone else. I'll just carry this myself."

But you know, carrying your burdens yourself, stuffing your pain and toughing it out like many people did in the WWII generation is not Christianity. Christianity is not maintaining a stiff upper lip. Toughing it out on our own is not what the Bible teaches. That may be good old fashioned American self-reliance, sucking it up. It may even be good old fashioned American pride – I can handle anything. I'm tough. I'm a survivor. I don't need anyone.

But handling your problems entirely by yourself is not biblical Christianity. First of all, we are invited by the Lord to cast our burdens upon him. So we are told in Psalm 55.22

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Ps 55:22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

And we read the words of Jesus in Matt. 11.28,

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Mt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We have a divine burden bearer who we can always go to and who invites us to take the load off ourselves. But one of the ways that Jesus bears our burdens is by working through others in the church.

There is a great illustration in the life of the apostle Paul. At one stage in his life he was terribly burdened. He was worried to death over the Corinthian Church

and their reaction to his rather severe letter. His mind had no rest. He was struggling internally. Here is what we read in 2 Cor. 7.5-7

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^{2Co 7:5} For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

How did Paul's comfort come to Paul? Through Paul's friend, Titus.

God uses people to lift us up. We are so individualistic in our society. As Christians we transfer our American individualism right into our Christian lives. We say: "Well, I've got this problem, but I will have to handle it just between me and God alone. I won't open up to my spouse, even though they keep asking me about it. I won't join a small group, or a support group. If I do, I certainly won't tell them what's really going on inside of me or how I'm really feeling. I need to handle my problems just between me and Jesus."

Those of you who have read your Bibles, have you noticed how often God uses people to support the burdened? If you are carrying a load, have you considered the fact that God wants to help you carry it through your brothers and sisters? Don't dismiss the help that God wants to give you because of your pride, or your self-sufficiency, or any sense of shame regarding taking your mask off and showing who you are.

I want to close with one last scripture. Mark 2 provides a great picture of what the apostle Paul was urging upon us in this new creation ministry of burden bearing. Mark 2.1-5

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^{Mk 2:1} A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven"

You know, just incidentally, I've always wanted Vineyard to be a Mark 2 type of church, where people are so eager to meet Jesus here that they would do

anything to get in. Wouldn't it be great to have it be known in the community that if you go to Vineyard Columbus, you will encounter Jesus there. Folks just waiting around for the church doors to open. There is this passion and drive that people just know that if they come to Vineyard there is help there, Jesus is there. Wouldn't it be great to be a Mark 2 church?

Well, this paralyzed man has friends who understand the ministry of burden bearing. They run up the outside stairway of this house. And if the house didn't have an outside stairway, they would run up the outside stairway of the nearby house and climb onto the flat roof of this house. They dig through the roof that would have been overlayed with straw and maybe a foot of dirt. They are breathing hard from carrying this man. They are perspiring from digging through the roof. Talk about being willing to pay the cost of friendship.

See, the ministry of burden bearing is another way to talk about costly friendship. The ministry of burden bearing is another way to talk about loving your neighbor. The apostle Paul says in Gal. 6.2,

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Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

What is the law of Christ? Paul tells us what the law of Christ is in Gal. 5.14

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Gal 5:14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

But you see, burden bearing is all about what I call costly friendship. Most of us are not very good friends because we won't pay the price of friendship. Sometimes friendship really hits you in the wallet. Your friend is going through a major problem, but they live in another state. Costly friendship means that you have to buy a plane ticket and fly to see your friend.

Costly friendship means that you have to make arrangements for your kids. Costly friendship means that you may be separated for a period of time from your spouse or boyfriend or girlfriend. Costly friendship means being available to another person, giving out your phone number, allowing someone to call you day or night.

What is going on in Mark 2 in the new creation ministry of burden bearing is not, "Hey, I stopped by the house, but no one was there. I fulfilled my obligation." "Hey, I stopped by the house and left a note on the bed while you were sleeping."

Don't you want to be a Mark 2 type friend? Don't you want a friend who will hang with you through anything?

I want to close by sharing with you a video of a man in our church named Tom Schubert, who recently was supported through his cancer by a group of other cancer survivors here at the Vineyard.

VIDEO

You know, we have so many support groups here:

- Cancer
- Crohns and Ulcerative colitis
- Fibromyalgia
- Infertility
- Step Parents Support Group
- Sexual Abuse
- Victims of Rape
- Divorce Care
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Grief
- Anger

Along with the hundreds of small groups we have here. Because God does not want us to carry our burdens by ourselves, he puts us in a church. And we are carrying a heavy load, he brings along a brother or sister and says, "Let me help you with that. Let me be an instrument of God's love. Let me bring a little bit of heaven into your world right now."

This is the new creation ministry of the church. Let's pray.

The New Creation of God

Rich Nathan

September 20-October 1, 2006

The Beloved Community Series

Galatians 6.1-5

I. New Creation: The Individual, The Community, The Cosmos
(2 Cor. 5.17; Col. 3.9,10)

II. The New Creation Ministry Of Restoration (Gal. 6.1)

A. Filled With The Holy Spirit (Eph. 5.18, 19)

B. Trapped In A Sin (Gal. 6.1)

C. Unbiblical Options

D. Rescue And Recovery (Mt. 18)

III. The New Creation Ministry Of Burden Bearing (Gal. 6.2)

A. All Kinds Of Burdens

B. God Uses People (2 Cor. 7.6, 7)

C. Carrying People Into Christ's Presence (Mk. 2.1-12)