

## **What Do You Do When You Discover Sin?**

---

Rich Nathan

Sermon—March 28-29, 1998

The Book of Galatians Series

Galatians 6:1-10

Several months ago I mentioned a study that had been done by a Dutch consulting firm concerning different national characteristics of different countries. In this particular study, this Dutch consulting firm measured, for example, how masculine or feminine different countries were. And so by masculine countries they looked at countries whose dominant value was performance over relationship; countries that valued big, fast and powerful over small, kind and compassionate. It turned out, according to their study that Japan was the most masculine country in the world, most task-oriented, most task-driven, most enamored with performance and goals. And Sweden was the most feminine country.

This Dutch consulting firm also measured countries by other criteria, for example, how people in the country responded to authority. Some countries there is a very dominating leader who people respond to and who rules with an iron fist. There is a very strong sense of hierarchy. And other countries are far more egalitarian. They like things more equal. So in Central and South America there is a long history of hierarchy. Their leaders are even called “Strong Men.” In Israel, on the other hand, the other hand there is a far more egalitarian spirit. Everyone has a right to express their opinion and they will. Respect is gained not by being in a certain position of leadership, but rather because of the merit of the individual. Even in the Israeli Army it is not because someone is a Sergeant that you obey their orders, but instead because that Sergeant gets down in the ditch and digs with us.

The difference between cultures can be really amusing and really frustrating at different points. I remember, as an aside, when we went to plant a church in Russia, one of the things we did was to arrange to have a huge shipment of food shipped over to the city that we were planting the church in, which was St. Petersburg, Russia, formerly called Leningrad. And we Christians had determined that we wanted a certain percentage of this food to go to an orphanage where we were ministering and to a school where a number of poor children were obviously inadequately fed. And so we wanted the food to go there. And we Christians had parceled it out. But at the same time we knew that in order to get the food into the city, we were going to have to satisfy the city government. So here is this American group sitting down with the assistant Mayor of the city and his little group. And we had this major culture clash.

We walked in and thanked him for meeting with us. We tried to be very cordial, very gracious. We said that we had this and this amount of food and we would like to give some of the food to this orphanage and some of it to a school. Immediately, the assistant Mayor slammed his fist down on the table and said, “20% will go to the park; 20% to the park service workers; and 20% to the wood

workers; and 20% to the sanitation workers.” Basically, he gave us out of this whole shipment 20% of the food to do with as we pleased.

So, not being raised in Russia, I thought that this might be subject to some discussion. That he was offering a proposal and we would engage in debate. And so I said, “Well, that’s a wonderful thought and I appreciate that. Let me share with you some of the reasons why we would like to give some of the food to this orphanage.” To which, he immediately assumed that my problem was hearing. That he had not said what he meant loud enough. And so he began to shout what he wanted. And when I tried to protest further, he assumed that I was not only deaf, but really, really stupid. And the only way to get through to a really stupid person, who also can’t hear, is to both shout and began to bang the table—a different view of hierarchy between Americans and Russians.

Now, the scale that is most relevant to today’s discussion was the scale of collectivism and individualism. That is how much a particular nation values community verses how much the nation values autonomy. Some countries have a very high value on family, community, on not violating a social norm. Some countries have a very high value on what other people think, making sure you fit in, not making waves. Other countries have a very high value on private opinion, getting your own way, individual decision-making, rights of privacy.

As I said to you before, guess where the US ranks compared to the rest of the world based on individualism verses community. We are #1 regarding individualism. Of the 150 nations surveyed, we were absolutely first, gold medal winners, concerning my opinion, my liberties ruling over everything.

As we are completing our study on the book of Galatians, over the last few weeks we have seen that freedom is one of the dominant themes of this book. The apostle Paul announces in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” The goal of the death of Christ is to liberate the individual. To liberate us from slavery, to rules and regulations and law, and to free us from religion so that we might have relationship with God our Father. Christ came to liberate us from the law process. Christ not only came to liberate us from the law, but to liberate us from the power of sin. So many Christians do not know this kind of liberation. They know they are freed from the penalty and guilt of sin, that Christ paid the price for our sins, but they don’t know what it feels like to be liberated from the dominating power of sin so that you no longer are compelled to do things that you don’t want to do. Christ died to set us free.

But here is the challenge, the rub, how do you balance freedom, where we are not subject to rules and regulations and law, where we are being liberated from sin, where we are not subject to the opinions of everyone around us—how do you balance freedom with living in relationship with other people? Freedom is easy to understand if you are living alone on an island in the Pacific or if you live in a cave, totally apart from other civilized people. You can live and act as you choose. But the moment you get around others and try to live in a family or in a marriage or in the church or have a nation that functions, now we find that we can’t just do as we please. We need red lights placed at intersections so that some people stop in order to let other people go. And if we had total freedom, all

we would have is continual car accidents. Some limitation of freedom is required for us to live in community.

So husbands and wives, for example, limit their freedom to sleep with whomever they choose in order to have a trusting, safe, fulfilling marital relationship. Airline pilots choose to limit their freedom to consume of alcohol in order to be trustworthy, safe, competent handlers of the lives of hundreds of passengers. Whenever you talk about freedom, you must immediately begin to explore some limits on freedom as it comes to living in relationship to other people.

In America, right now, we have really extravagant claims of freedom. Part of the reason why we are struggling so much as a nation to just hang together and walk together and have some sort of unity is that many of us have adopted a perspective of complete freedom, complete liberty without any limits whatsoever. That we ought to be able to basically do what we want to do when we want to do it without anyone else being able to say: "Stop that. That's not good. That's not right. That's not moral. That's going to be dangerous." America has bought into a philosophy of almost absolute freedom, live and let live, you do your thing, I will do my thing.

The apostle Paul says: "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free" – past tense. Freedom is an already accomplished fact. It is the great goal of Christ's death, to free us. But freedom is a gift that must be preserved. Many of us believe the lie that says we will gain greater security or fulfillment or pleasure living in the jail cell then in what the Bible calls the glorious liberty of the children of God. SO we hook ourselves to the computer screen and spend night after night on-line, giving up real human contact or real relationship with God for an addictive relationship with our computer. Why do you think women engage in a series of empty relationships with guys or guys womanize from 1 gal to another? They may think it's the sex, but it's almost always a fruitless search for love or security or significance. Someone tell me that I am valuable; someone nurture me and make me secure.

Now for you, the hook may be with food in the form of over-eating or an eating disorder. It may be a drink or cigarettes or rage or gambling or shopping. Somewhere along the line many freed people choose to live in the security of the jail cell instead of entering into the freedom that Christ won for us at the cross.

Now, there are various ways we can outline Galatians 6:1-10. You might say verses 1-6 concern handling freedom in others and verses 7-10 might be called handling freedom in ourselves. Handling Freedom in Others; Handling Freedom in Ourselves. Verses 1-6 you might call Mutual Accountability. And in verses 7-10 Personal Responsibility. Mutual Accountability; and Personal Responsibility. You could say that verses 1-6 concerns dealing with sin in another; and verses 7-10 concerns dealing with sin in ourselves.

I have chooses to outline the text this way in verses 1-5 concerns preserving freedom in another and verses 7-10 concerns preserving freedom for ourselves. I've called today's message, "Preserving Freedom from Life Controlling Habits." Let's pray.

Galatians 6:1-10

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.”

As we begin to explore the issues of limiting our freedom and living in community with others, we begin with the question of who’s freedom are we seeking to preserve? The apostle Paul lays it out very plainly. He says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” All of Paul’s remarks about speaking to someone who has gotten trapped has to do with the Christian church and is restricted to discussing issues of sin and who have been given freedom by Christ. Paul is not concerned about what so and so is doing at your workplace or another person is doing in your school or what Hollywood is doing or what is in the local paper. To those who haven’t yet stepped over the line and personally accepted God’s gift of salvation – we share the gospel. This text is restricted to those who have been set free already by Christ and are preserving the gift of freedom.

Many Christians do not appreciate God’s purpose in the local church. Many Christians have so much swallowed American individualism that they see church as a spiritual luxury, something that is nice, if you are into that kind of thing and you can afford it. But it is not a spiritual necessity, something vital to our capacity to live freely as individuals. So long as a person sees the church as an optional extra, they will not be able to really hear what Paul is saying in this text regarding preserving freedom or responding to correction of sin. So long as someone says that it is all just a big hassle anyway and I don’t need to deal with these kinds of relationships. I don’t have to be corrected. We are going to miss everything that Paul is saying here in Galatians 6.

In America we so emphasize the message that you don’t need to go to church to be saved that we miss the other part of the message, but you do need to be involved in a local church if you are ever going to walk in victory, live freely as a Christian. If you are ever going to fulfill God’s plan for your life, you must be intimately connected with a local church. It is true that you can be saved by yourself in your living room simply by hearing Billy preach over the TV station or by simply listening to a radio preacher or simply by reading a tract or a book. You can be saved without ever having a church around you, but you cannot fulfill God’s purpose in your life for you to enjoy the freedom that Christ achieved at the cross if you don’t have a strong connection to a local church. It is more than just attending on Sunday morning or Saturday evening. Your involvement must include enough relationship with other believers that they have the opportunity to speak into your life and you have the opportunity to speak into their lives. Church is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

The whole Bible tells us from beginning to end that we do not do well alone. One of the first things that God said to Adam in the Garden was that “It is not good for man to be alone.” Adam didn’t respond, “Hey, me and Jesus by ourselves. We do just fine.” God said we cannot fulfill his purposes in our lives

by being in isolation, by simply asserting our autonomy, by saying to other people, "You have no right to say anything to me. You have no right to correct me. You have no right to point out my blind spots. Get out of my face." WE must be in relationship with each other in order to fulfill God's purpose. The book of Ecclesiastes says "Two are better than one. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But woe to him who falls and has no one to help him up." Have you ever been in that situation where you have fallen and have had no one to help you up? Where you were so out of touch with others, so isolated, so alone, that no one was around to discover you wrapped up and enslaved by a destructive habit. If you have ever been there, you know how devastating and destructive a place like that can be. We need the stimulation and encouragement of each other to walk in liberty. We need someone to attack the stronghold of hopelessness and the lies of defectiveness in our lives and say, Christ dies for you. You can walk in victory. You don't have to sin. What an exciting radical thought, you don't have to sin.

In the book of Malachi at the end of the OT it speaks about time in the life of the Jewish people where they were in spiritual decline. They stopped worshipping God in any true way. Obedience was very weak. They even came to the point of wondering whether it mattered to God at all if they obeyed or not. In Mal. 3:15, the people asked, "Is it worth while to serve God?" It was a low point in their national life together. Does it make any difference what we do? And then it says, "those who feared the Lord talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name." Some people who still had relationship with God began to talk with other people who had relationship with God. They began to stimulate each other's obedience to God, their reverence for God, their worship for God. It says the Lord saw them encouraging each other, strengthening each other, correcting each other, and the Lord was so pleased watching these people work together that God said, "They will be mine in the day when I make up my treasured possession, I will spare them just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him."

So we begin to value fellowship, our Christian community with each other. We see that God's purpose in our lives cannot be fulfilled apart from it. And what is it that we are to do in fellowship with each other? Well, one of the things we are to do with each other is to restore each other. If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. This word for restore is used in secular Greek for setting a fractured or dislocated bone. A bone is broken and they would restore it. They would straighten it out. The word was also used of the apostles when they were mending the nets at the end of a long fishing trip. They dragged the nets in, overhauled them, cleaned them, mended them, folded them together.

Now, here is what the apostle Paul is saying. The goal that Jesus had in mind for each one of us is real life, liberation from enslaving habits, and things that break us and fracture us and enslave us. Things that tear us and bring us down. The goal that Jesus has for us is freedom. Freedom from feeling dead inside. Freedom from always feeling shame and guilt. That is why Christ died –

to set us free. But we have a role in each other's lives in helping one another to restore the gift of that freedom, practically, that Christ died for. Like Lazarus who was called forth from the grave in John 11, Jesus told his family and friends to unwrap him. That's our job: to untie people. We restore where they can live. A women's group, a men's group, a small group can mend that person. We can straighten them out. We can pull them out of the quicksand that they have fallen into. See, you can't really walk out freedom without the help of your brothers and sisters who take a mending, untying, correcting role in your life.

There are, of course, other options. We could say, "Live and let live. I wouldn't do what that other person is doing, but it is none of my business. Am I my brother's keeper?" Like the priest and the Levite in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, we could take the wide road around a person who is having problems and avert our eyes, saying, "Well, that is their problem." We could avoid. We could be smug and proud. "Well, they made their bed, now let them lie in it. I see that they are falling, but they fell because of their own stupid choices. I see that this particular person is stuck and addicted. I warned him and he went ahead and did what he wanted to do anyway. Now let him deal with the consequences." We could avoid. We could smug and proud.

The apostle Paul says in the local church and with other Christian people in your family, at your workplace, I want you to restore, to mend, to heal, to set right, to correct. You say, "Why should I go through the trouble of talking with someone else, trying to correct them, getting involved in their business, invading their space, especially when they aren't going to be real receptive to my pointing out of any flaws or faults. Why should I go to the trouble of getting together with a fallen brother or sister and try to assist them in getting up. Why? Why should I be involved in restoring their liberty?"

Well, for one thing, you restore what is valuable to you. I don't think that people would spend hours restoring a particleboard bookcase. It is not worth it. Particleboard you throw out. But if you have a beautiful cherry bookcase, something that was handmade by your grandfather, was passed down through the family lines, something that your grandfather had willed to you – you might take the time to restore it, restoring it to its natural beauty. We restore what is valuable.

They are spending literally tens of millions of dollars to restore the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which had been dulled by years of pollution and former poor restoration efforts. We restore, we invest in what is valuable. And the apostle Paul is essentially saying to us, do you understand that your relationships with your brothers or sisters are of real value? Other Christian believers are not just cheap commodities that we can allow to fall by the wayside. Well, so what, another casualty in the war. This is a person that Christ bled and died for. This is someone that Jesus paid for at the price of his own blood. They have real value and seeing another Christian walk in victory, triumph over sin in their lives ought to have real value to us.

And our relationship with each other ought to have real value to us.

Here is what I want you to do. I would like you to close your eyes for a moment and say, "Lord, is there anyone that I know who is a professing Christian

and who has fallen by the roadside that I am just letting lie there? Is there anyone I know who has walked away from the church, seems to have walked away from Christ, who is caught up in a sin, is living a lifestyle that is really opposed to Christ's will for their lives, that I have just said, 'That is their life and they need to live it as they please?'" Write their names down on your outlines. We are going to talk about them in just a moment. I have asked God to raise to the surface hundreds of people all across our congregation. We restore what is valuable.

And we restore what is lasting, what is eternal. Listen to me. You don't spend very much time repairing something in your motel room that you are just stopping in for the night. There is a leaky faucet in your motel room – hey, that is somebody else's problem. That is the hotel owner's problem. I don't think very many people take out their plumbing tools and begin to fix the faucet.

If you are in a rental property and there is a problem with the roof – hey that is the landlord's problem. I am not going to repair the roof. But if you have just bought an expensive home and you are planning to live in that home for 20 years, you would probably make an investment in that home.

Now listen, the reason why you would be involved in restoring another professing Christian is because our relationships with each other last forever. See, church is not a place we just go to. The church is what we are. It is a network of relationships that we Christians will be in with each other forever. Our relationship with a fallen brother or sister will last forever. These are not disposable like disposable razors. We will be connected with each other as brothers and sisters as long as we are connected to God our Father.

You know, we believers are found according to a verse from the book of Romans that says, "Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God, nothing can ever separate us from the love of the Father." But you know, there is a corresponding truth to that – nothing can ever separate us from the love of God or from our heavenly Father and that is nothing can ever separate you from your brothers and sisters. So in answer to the question: am I my brother's keeper? the answer is yes.

And by the way, for those of you who are not familiar with the Bible, the person who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" was Cain who killed his brother.

We restore each other because we see that this other person is valuable to us and to God and that our relationship to each other is a lasting relationship.

When do we engage in this restoring ministry. When is it that we go to a brother or sister, for the purpose of mending, straightening out, setting things right? So that their freedom is restored. The apostle Paul says there is one time when we do it. When someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. Over taken literally means entrapped.

When do we set straight, when do we limit each other, when do we correct, when do we restrict another's freedom – we do so only regarding matters of sin. We don't straighten out other people regarding matters of opinion, matters of preference, or taste. He wears his hair long, I really need to correct him about that and restore him. Hairstyle and clothes style and musical preferences, what someone eats or drinks – you are a vegetarian and they love burgers – we aren't

to limit another person's freedom regarding eating. What version of the Bible they use, King James version or New International Version. Whether they do their devotions in the morning or evening. Or they kneel, stand, walk or sit. Or love Vineyard music or prefer hymns. All of that is in the realm of the freedom of the individual. The only time that you go to another in brotherly devotion or sisterly devotion to restore them is when that person is in sin, a violation of God's commands, a violation of God's Word. God's Word says this and they're doing the opposite. This person is plainly disobeying something in the Bible.

And you know, I see churches in America fall on the opposite extremes of what the apostle Paul was saying. On the one hand in many liberal churches, people have taken the approach of saying who are we to judge. We need to allow each person to find their own way and accept their own course as if slavery to sin doesn't matter to God, as if there are no absolutes at all. On the other hand, we have ultra-conservative churches, which squeeze out every drop of freedom of the individual so that matters of opinion become matters of sin and righteousness. What God leaves up to the individual in their own relationship to Christ is a matter for the church to begin deciding and authority comes down on the individual. You must carry such and such a Bible and you must look like this kind of person. Women, you may not cut your hair or wear earrings or make up. You may not do this or that or this or that.

And Paul preserves this tightrope between individual freedom and community when he says that the boundary, the limits of a person's freedom and the time we are going to challenge them and bring them to a place of restoration is when they are in sin. So here is the evaluation process. You say:

1. Is this person I am concerned about a brother or a sister? Because if they are not, there is nothing to restore. I need to present them with the gospel. I am not restoring, mending something that was formerly whole and is now frayed. Are they a brother? If they are, they are valuable to God and my relationship with them is eternal, therefore I need to be involved in restoring. Has the person said they want to live under the lordship of Christ?
2. Is this a sin? Have they been overtaken in a sin? Gossip, continual slander, lying, embezzlement, fornication, sexual sin, drunkenness, greed, bitterness, abuse of another, drug use.
3. Then you say, "Am I the right person to do it?" Paul says, "You who are spiritual should restore him." Oh, that let's me off the hook. I am not perfect. Paul says that you don't have to be perfect. But are you a person who is walking in the Spirit? Is the Fruit of the Spirit beginning to be evidenced in your life? If perfection were required, then none of us could be engaged in this restoration of freedom ministry. But I think the reason he says "You who are spiritual should do this" is that correction needs to come from someone who has some level of credibility to speak about this issue.

You know, what I think could be said over again the spiritual is the hypocritical – the parent who has a cigarette dangling from their mouth and is saying to their teenage son, "Johnny, you really shouldn't smoke." There is a little bit of a



credibility gap there. If we are going to try to pull someone out of the quicksand, we need to make sure we, ourselves, are standing on firm ground.

How are we to go to this other person? The apostle Paul says, "If someone who is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." The ministry of restoration is a ministry of gentleness. And I have said this over and over again, but Jesus likens the restoration ministry to eye surgery. In Matt. 7 Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye. How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' while all the time there is a plank in your own eye. You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Anyone who wants to be involved in a restoring ministry, you see someone is having a problem and you want to help them out, you want to restore them, you want them to enjoy freedom and victory, you must understand, first of all, that what you are doing is a ministry of eye surgery. People are not like asphalt where we can come to them with a jackhammer and beat away and expect to be accepted. People are not trees that we can come to them with an ax and hit them and expect that our little restoration ministry is going to be received. And you know this applies to your spouse and your kids. Sometimes we think that correction in our family operated on a different set of principles than correction with others.

Correction is always eye surgery. And when we bang around in someone's eye and poke them in the eye, it is no wonder that we receive a defensive reaction.

What does gentleness look like? Well, it looks like the way you would want to be treated if you were overtaken in a sin or a fault. It looks like someone coming along side and putting their arm around us instead of pointing their finger in our face. It looks like a focus upon the issue instead of a broad sweeping accusation of our person. It is one thing to say to someone, "I really don't like it when you gossip. When you gossip that is sin." It is another thing to say to someone, "You are a defective human being. You are an awful person. You never do anything right. You always do things that are wrong." Gentleness seeks to confine the restoration to an issue. I am coming to talk to you about your drug use. I want to talk to you about the fact that you are not serving in this home. Gentleness is mindful of the fact that only about 7-10% of what a person picks up is the actual content of our words, that communication involves our tone and all of our verbal cues, the way our body is postured. Dogs understand that communication is more than content, it is tone and body posture. Sometimes when we have nothing to do we tease our pets. We will pet our golden retriever on the head and say, "Yes, yes, you are such a stupid dog. Yes you are. Come here, you fat dog. Yes, you are stinky and need a bath. Come here and give me a kiss." Our dog will just be loving you. On the other hand, we might say to the dog, "Come here. What did you do, you good dog?"

It is the same thing with people. Gentleness involves the tone of your voice and the way you posture yourself and whether you are speaking as an ally or an enemy.

Part of gentleness is being a burden bearer in the life of another. The apostle Paul says, "Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." See, the spirit that we go in is not the spirit of accusation. Rather, before you go to correct another person, you must ask yourself this question. Am I willing to not only point out the fault of another, but to walk with this other person through their problem to actually assist them to be fully liberated? You are not a restorer just because you can point out a fault. Faultfinding is the easiest game in town. All we need to do is look around, find problems and criticize. There are a thousand things in each other that we can criticize. Faultfinding just brings more condemnation.

A freedom-restoring ministry is a ministry of burden bearing. It is I am not only going to point out the area that needs correction in your life, but I am going to stand with you and shoulder the load and walk this out together. I am going to pray with you. Or I am going to counsel you. Or I am going to point you to a counselor or a recovery group or a 12-step group or some place of healing and help. Part of gentleness means that we don't only find fault in another, but we carry the load together. I stay with you long enough to actually help you out of the pit. And if you are not prepared to do that, you may not be prepared to be involved in what Paul is speaking about regarding restoration. If you want just a quick hit, you are not a restorer.

In addition to gentleness, Paul says we must go in carefulness. "But watch yourselves, lest you also may be tempted." Now there are two possible ways to read this, both of which I think have merit. The first is that if you go and address a problem in someone's life and before hand you don't pray for your own protection regarding what you are going to say and after you get done with the time of correction, that you don't again pray, you may find yourself having opened a spiritual door in your life to the very problem that you have corrected this other person on. I have heard from so many men and women who have told me that they went and corrected a person regarding a sexual sin and then several days later they found themselves struggling personally in their own sexual thoughts. Paul says that what happened there, they haven't paid attention to this little admonition, "Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." They approached this other person's sins in a cavalier way, not understanding that there was spiritual power being confronted, that they needed to go fully clothed in the armor of God, asking God's protection, praying after for a cleansing of their minds. There is a theological term for what happens when we correct another person and we are fully protected. The theological term is getting slimed. Some of you may remember the old Ghostbusters movie where the ghosts would just slime people? The temptation may be along the lines of the specific issue that you are going to correct and that is why you need to pray before and after.

The temptation may be a temptation to pride, self-superiority – the temptation of the Pharisee – "I thank God that I am not like this other man." This adulterer, this drunkard, this embezzler – I thank God I am not like them.

And of course, the warning of God when we get into a position of self-superiority is "He who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall." God opposes the

proud and gives grace to the humble. And so Paul speaks about the problem of pride in verses 3-4, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions and then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to someone else."

Watch for self-superiority and pride when you go. We go in gentleness and carefulness, but we go in firmness. The apostle Paul says in verse 5, "For each one should carry his own load." In other words, yes it is true that we bear each other's load, but there is a pack that we carry that no one else can carry for us – our own individual accountability with God. And I think the apostle Paul is giving us surprising modern counsel about boundaries here. Not allowing another person to shift onto us that which they must carry for themselves.

See, here's the deal. Very often with someone who is in sin, what they want to do to the person who is coming along side to restore is to shift some of the blame of their behavior to that other person. "Well, you know, I wouldn't be drinking so much if you didn't nag me all the time. Its no wonder that a man has to drink, with a wife like you and the home condition like this."

"Well, I wouldn't be committing adultery if you were just a little more loving and a little more romantic. What's a man to do with a cold fish like you? If you hadn't put on so much weight..."

Paul is saying that no one can shift their own individual accountability with God. Yes, we come with a spirit of gentleness. We say we are going to help you bear the burden, that is the burden of finding help. But no one should allow another to place on them the burden of responsibility for their own sin.

Listen to me, restorers, and I especially want to speak to those of you who are kind-hearted, sensitive helpers: Do not allow another person to shift to you the blame for their own sin, ever. I wouldn't be doing drugs, if it weren't for you. I wouldn't be abusive, if it weren't for you. I wouldn't be drinking, if it weren't for you. I wouldn't be involved in pornography, if it weren't for you. I wouldn't be doing this or that...

Each man and woman must shoulder his own pack before God. And our firmness in making sure that another person doesn't shift their pack onto us must be even be shown in our unwillingness to back away from our correction. Very often, the person who is corrected will attempt to turn the tables on the corrector by saying, "Well, you have problems in your own life and the reason why I haven't received your correction is because of the manner in which you addressed it. You were not gentle. The problem in this situation is that you are not gentle. And I can't believe the way you approached me. You raised your voice. You weren't pleasant. You were stern. I felt condemned."

Gentle people, restoring people, listen. Don't allow the other person who has been overtaken in a sin to turn the tables on you this way. If you must admit to an absence of gentleness, admit to it, but then get right back to the issue. The issue here is not my gentleness or lack thereof, the issue here is your drunkenness. Well, I wouldn't be drinking, if it weren't for your nagging. I just have to have some relief. The issue here is not my nagging, the issue is your drunkenness. Well, if you didn't go to that church which condemns everyone, we

wouldn't have this kind of problem. The issue here is not the church I attend, the issue here is your drunkenness.

Here is a little tip on bringing correction. Sometimes you have to sound like a broken record. This is especially true with teenagers: "You aren't fair!" "Maybe not, but you still can't go to that party." "All my friends are going!" "Well, their parents may be fools, but you aren't going." "You hate me and want me to be miserable." "You can think what you want but you still can't go to that party." And people who are very skillful in debating, who are very argumentative, and who are more powerful than the restorer will often try to shift the ground of the discussion away from the pet sin that they don't want attacked, that pet sin that they want to continue to cultivate in their lives, they want to shift the ground of attack away from that pet sin onto the manner of the restorer or the problems of the restorer or the church that the restorer goes to. Don't allow that to happen, gentle restorer. Keep focused. Stay focused. Stay firm. Be gentle, but stay firm so that this valuable person is restored to freedom.

A person is not let off the hook just because the restorer did not use the proper degree of gentleness. We are still responsible to search out for ourselves the truth in any correction.

We talked about restoring freedom in others, let's talk about restoring freedom to ourselves. When we come to ourselves and we discover sin in ourselves, we discover we have gotten enslaved again. The approach we ought to take with ourselves is very different than the approach we take with others. Listen to me now. Regarding others, the approach that we take is gentleness. It is performing eye surgery on another. But regarding ourselves, the approach we are to take with ourselves is ruthlessness. Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

Ruthlessness, now listen to me, we get it completely upside down – when it comes to other's sins, we approach them ruthlessly. I can't believe you are still doing that particular thing and we hit them with a bat. But regarding ourselves, we want to be treated ever so gently. We are like people with a bad sunburn. The least little probe and we go, "Ohhh, don't hurt me. Go gently..." and we nurse our flesh and cater to our flesh and protect and defend our flesh.

Do you know what Paul says for us to do with our flesh? He says, "Crucify it." Chapter 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ, Jesus has crucified the sinful nature with its passion and desires." Self-crucifixion is the path of freedom. Christ died to give us freedom. We need our brothers and sisters to sometimes correct us regarding areas that are out of joint in our lives. And concerning ourselves, we must crucify those portions of our lives that are out of step with the will of God.

Now, crucifixion is a horrible thing in the ancient world. Crucifixion involved nailing a person's wrists to the cross bar, driving an iron spike into a very large nerve. That would produce excruciating pain. A person's feet would be placed together and a spike would be driven through both feet, through major nerves in the feet. Apart from the excruciating pain, there would be a major problem of

breathing. When a person's arms are outstretched, and a person is hanging, you can't breathe, so you have to lift yourself up and down in order to breathe and exhale. Every time you lifted yourself up there would be searing pain in your feet and hands – incredible cramps in your body. The basic way that a person would die would be a slow death as in drowning. Fluid would gather in the lungs that couldn't be exhaled and so you would slowly drown. And the shock of the pain would also kill.

The short of it is, that both Jesus and the apostle Paul described the way to deal with our own sin as likened to the crucifixion of a man – as a low, horrible, painful, ruthless death. That's what living free from life controlling habits takes, a slow, horrible painful death. Listen to me. If you insist on pain-free living, you will never walk in victory. You can deceive yourself to the contrary and say, "but I do want to enjoy the liberty Christ purchased. I do want freedom. I do want victory." But do you want freedom enough to experience pain to get it? People who are trapped in long-term sin generally will have to undergo the pain of withdrawal as they learn to live without their addiction. No pain—no freedom.

Ruthlessness does not mean beating yourself up after you sin. It does not mean doing some penance or trying to earn your way back into the favor of God. When we sin there is grace and mercy to cover that sin because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Ruthlessness with our sin means dealing ruthlessly with every occasion that that sin has to plant itself into your life. It is dealing ruthlessly with every opportunity that sin would take to establish itself in your life.

To deal ruthlessly may mean that you confess your failing to another. To deal ruthlessly may mean that you go to a recovery group. Dealing ruthlessly may mean setting up an appointment with a trained counselor. To deal ruthlessly means that you shut every door where that sin has been enslaving you. You're living with your boyfriend or girlfriend or sleeping with them, it's going to be painful to stop doing that once you've gone over the cliff. They will fight you every step of the way. But living free in Christ is worth it. Being clean with God is worth the pain.

If your problem is shopping and overspending, ruthlessness means that you don't go window shopping with a pocket full of credit cards. You stop applying for new credit cards. You cut up your old credit cards and you refuse to go to the mall for a year. You take out no new loans, no new debt. You go in for financial counseling. You establish a strict budget and you ruthlessly stick to it.

The reason why many of never overcome a significant habit in our life is we do not want to deal that ruthlessly with our flesh. We say, "No, no, no. Let me down off the cross. I'll be good, honest. The pain of undergoing this kind of transformation is too great."

Our flesh screams for mercy. Our flesh screams for pity. Towards our sin, we are to be merciless, pitiless. Toward the sins of others we are to be merciful and gentle. We always recognize that there is the law of sowing and reaping regarding our own sins. It is the law of the harvest. The apostle Paul said, "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not

become wary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

We deal ruthlessly with our own sin because we understand the law of the harvest. That we will reap in the same kind and quality and quantity of what we have sown. If we sow into our flesh, we will from the flesh reap destruction – the destruction of relationships, peace, spiritual lives, reputations. We are often deceived about this law of the harvest, aren’t we? Paul says, “Don’t be deceived.” We are often deceived. We often think we can sow one kind of seed and reap a different kind of harvest. We can sow weeds in our lives and reap a crop of grass.

We are often deceived. We can sow thoughtlessly, heedlessly, carelessly and reap a wonderful fruitful harvest. Paul says, “Don’t be deceived.”

We are often deceived. We are deceived by delay. Hey, I have been sowing for the flesh for six months to a year and I haven’t reaped destruction. We are deceived by delay. We are deceived by delay in that judgment doesn’t fall immediately for our sins. And we are deceived by delay because we don’t get this great crop of fruit when we have been doing right. But the principles of farming are the same principles of the spiritual life. Just like when you put seed into the ground, lettuce seed, the next moment you don’t have lettuce. When you put cucumber seeds into the ground, the next moment you don’t dig them up and have large cucumbers. It takes months and months to have that seed grow.

Don’t be deceived by delay. Because if the hammer of major consequences hasn’t come down, it doesn’t mean that it won’t fall. And because everything isn’t going well in your life immediately doesn’t mean that it won’t go well after you make major painful decisions. This law of the harvest, friends, applies to everything in your lives. It applies to investment in your marriage. It applies to your investment and discipleship of you kids in childraising. It applies to your income. It applies to your walking in the liberty that Christ died for. We don’t fully enjoy it all at once. The fact is, once you resolve to live freely, things are almost always more difficult in the short-term for weeks, or even months...why? Because before you were giving in to temptation and now you aren’t. Generally for more folks, the process is 2 steps forward, 1 step back but then it’s 3 steps forward and 1 back then 5 steps forward and so on. We may despair over the steps back but Christ is more committed than we are to our walking in liberty and freedom.