

I read this week about an unusual figure in Church History. His name was Simeon the Stylite. Simeon was a monk who lived in the Syrian desert. Around 423 AD, he found a short pillar on the edge of the desert, and he climbed on it and didn't get off it for six years. Simeon thought true spirituality was best expressed if he lived like a hermit and communed with God in solitude, free from worldly distractions.

After six years, he discovered he couldn't isolate himself enough on a ten-foot pillar. So a 50-foot pole was constructed for him. At the top was a one square meter platform where Simeon the Stylite stayed for the next 30 to 40 years. He wanted to be 50 feet farther from people and 50 feet closer to God. Children would bring him scraps of flatbread and goat's milk to drink hoisted up to him in a bucket. It was oppressive heat in the summer and bone-chilling cold in the winter. If you were to look up austerity in the dictionary, you might see a picture of Simeon the Stylite. I was amazed to read that he wrote letters, and mediated in local disputes, and eventually achieved sainthood.

I think some of us may find in our busy lives that sitting on a pole isolated from all the noise around them sounds like heaven. For the rest of us, it sounds like hell—like one of those hardcore adventure vacations. What did you do on your vacation? I climbed the Matterhorn. I walked the Pacific Coast Trail. I sat on a 50-foot pole for two weeks! It was the most rest I've had in years!

I think most of us would say, "That is one heck of a spiritual man up there on that pole praying, meditating, and reading for 50 years." And maybe he was. But there is something about this that just doesn't add up. It raises the question: What does it mean to be spiritual? As far as Simeon was concerned, one could be more spiritual in the desert than in the city, more spiritual above the ground than on it.

If we think about the spiritual life today, some of us could look at Simeon and think, he never had to find childcare, work through a conflict with his spouse, or care for his dying mother. Actually, he declined to come down when she was sick but asked that they bring her casket to him so he could look down on her coffin and pay his respects. Simeon didn't have to save for retirement, manage a team, or volunteer to help with CPCKids. You get my point. Most of us are not able to live alone in the desert. So here is the question, "What does true spirituality look like for us?"

We end our study in Galatians on this note. For those whose foundation for their life is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Galatians

offers us an entirely different way of thinking about the spiritual life.

We have learned that we are justified by God through faith. And that the spiritual life is not something we produce through some ritual or method. To put it simply, our spiritual life flows from God, from the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. A life led by the Spirit is nurtured by reading scripture, attending public worship, and so on, but we remember that the spiritual life itself comes from God. As Kevin taught us last week, only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

But these spiritual fruits are not for our private enjoyment. True spirituality is not a quest for personal self-fulfillment. True spirituality does not need to be discovered while sitting on a 50-foot pole. Life in the Spirit flourishes for the sake of others. Life in the Spirit is to be exercised in public. Life in the Spirit doesn't grow in isolation but within the new community that we have been talking about throughout Galatians. Spiritual life is meant to be shared. It is less like a fruit hidden away in some secret garden and more like one that grows in a public park.

From last week, we read these verses from chapter 5. "*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other*" (Gal. 5:25-26). Paul is drawing out a contrast between two heart conditions here, one described in Galatians 5:25-26 and the other in Galatians 6.

The Greek word Paul used, translated here as conceited, is better translated to the old English word, vainglory—literally, empty of glory. The Bible tells us that we were created to be filled by recognition and affirmation from God, to be filled and satisfied with God's glory, to have fellowship with God and to hear from God, and to have God's approval. That nothing on earth could ever fill our hearts more than hearing words from God, like, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There is an insatiable emptiness when we seek to find recognition, affirmation, and approval from anything except God himself.

We have this God-shaped hole that can only be filled with the gospel. And if we look to be filled through other means, our motives turn cynical. Take our motive for serving, for example. If our motive isn't God's approval, we serve others in order to fill our need to feel better about ourselves. Or, in our relationships, how can I profit in some way through this or that relationship? How might my service to others somehow bolster my fragile self-esteem?

When the Spirit isn't living and working in me, my interactions are for my glory at the expense of others instead of for God's glory at my expense. But the good news is that the gospel is not cynical. The Holy Spirit brings us all the affirmation, recognition, and applause we could ever need because what we need comes from our good Father and Creator.

When we are not Spirit-led, Paul says we are subject to envy. Envy means I look at others around me and feel like I am inferior. And it makes me angry because I hate feeling inferior to someone else. No Christian should ever feel envy because the gospel levels us and lifts us, sees us as all of equal value.

Then Paul says don't provoke. The idea here is when we are not led by the spirit, we are aggressive. We say, "I can win. I can beat you." I am aggressive not to truly help others but to win by doing something better so that I can feel better about myself. It's a superiority complex.

Okay, enough about life without the Spirit. Let's look at some principles of true spirituality that come from being led by the Spirit. It's time to taste some spiritual fruit. *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). Paul says to Spirit-led believers:

Practice Gentle Restoration

This is restoring one another from sin. The idea here is being "caught in the act." When one of us falls into this kind of sin, we need proper spiritual care. Paul says "brothers and sisters," remember that the church is a family. But this wonderful position God put us in doesn't keep us out of sin. There are times when we get knocked down or caught in a transgression.

What should be done? It's very simple, "restore him." You know, when people mess up in the world, they get canceled. They're done. Thank God it doesn't have to be that way in the family of God. The word for restore that Paul uses here is a medical term for healing that means "To return to its former condition." The idea is to gently mend something that is broken.

Restoring may sound simple, but it is very hard. It takes courage to act. It takes courage to confront, engage, and invest in someone caught in sin and to do it without pride or self-promotion. To help them confess their sins and find forgiveness in Christ, and to help them mend broken relationships.

Who should do the restoring? Paul writes, "you who are spiritual." It takes maturity. Depending on how widespread the effects of the sin, the hurt, the anger, the betrayal is, it may take a season of working with this person with a safe, loving team around them to bring healthy accountability. It's a journey; it can't be rushed. You are right if you are thinking this is hard, and I hope some of you are called by God to help gently restore a brother or sister in Christ. When we serve God as Spirit-led

believers, it always takes something from us. Restoring requires sacrifice for someone else.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. vv. 2-5

Practice Humble Burden Bearing

This Spirit-led work is not about gentleness as much as it is about work. It's less about mending a broken bone and more about carrying a stretcher. Many in our church suffer under the weight of burdens, and they cannot carry these burdens alone. Burdens take many forms: sorrow, grief, worry, doubt, poverty, loneliness, illness, divorce, disability, and depression. Things we all face from time to time at CPC. Things our wonderful group leaders face as they care for their group members. It will look like time spent with someone. It may be visiting someone who is lonely. It may be a meal or help with a move. It's coming alongside someone who has a 100-pound burden, and you take on 50 pounds, and they carry the other 50 pounds. When we do this, we are fulfilling the law of Christ. Remember what Paul said in chapter Galatians 5:14, *"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

The gospel tells us that Christ carried our greatest burdens—sin, and guilt. And those are burdens only God could bear. So if God has already carried our greatest burdens on the cross, then surely he can handle lighter loads as well. I am my brother's keeper. The principle here is my life for yours. That is the gospel. As modeled by Jesus, love is a substitutionary sacrifice. For you who are parents, think about this. I know if Julie and I had never given up things in our lives, sacrificed for our children, we would have hurt them badly.

Instead of thinking we are something and comparing ourselves with others, Paul says to test ourselves against God's standards. As the Puritans called it, "Self-Examination." The people who do the best at bearing one another's burdens know their own strengths and weaknesses. Your close Christian friends, your Men's Fraternity and WBS tablemates, and community group can help you test yourself and be confident about who you are in Christ and how you can best bear another's burdens.

Then in verse 5, Paul says, "each one should carry their own load." Back in verse 2, Paul used the Greek word *baros* as burden as in unbearable load. And in verse 5, he uses the Greek word *phortion*, which describes the weight every person should carry, as in their own backpack. Paul is saying bear another's unbearable burdens but also don't let someone else carry what you are personally responsible for before God.

Practice Generous Sharing

"Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor" (v. 6). Here, Paul is talking about what takes place between those that teach the word and those who receive the teaching. We get the English word Catechism from the original language here. Spiritual people take care of those who work hard to teach and preach the Word of God well. Spiritual people know how to generously share.

The Apostle Paul is nearing the end of his letter. His main themes have just about been taught. What's left are some final thoughts that, at first glance, you would think are not connected, but they do link together beautifully. The first is the principle of sowing and reaping.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. vv. 7-8

Practice the Principle of Sowing and Reaping

If the farmer wants a harvest, he must sow seed in his field; otherwise, no harvest. Good seed will produce a good crop. If he sows a lot of seed, he should have a lot of harvest. If he sows sparingly, he will reap sparingly as well.

The same principle operates in the moral and spiritual sphere. If a person is faithful and conscientious in sowing spiritual things, then he can expect a good harvest. If he sows his wild oats, so to speak, then he can't expect to reap fine grapes. Or, as Hosea warned his readers, *"They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7a).*

Paul says don't be deceived by this principle of sowing and harvesting. We can't sow seeds of one kind and expect to reap a harvest of another. We might imagine we can get away with it, but that's impossible. God is not mocked. Paul is saying that we might fool ourselves, but we cannot fool God.

Even though we are a new creation and live in a new household of believers, we still can sow bad seeds in our field. To sow the flesh means to feed it, coddle it, and stroke it instead of crucifying it. Every time we harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, wallow in self-pity, linger in bad company, or look at pornography, we are sowing to the flesh.

Some of us sow to the flesh every day and still wonder why we don't reap holiness. The old adage is true, "Sow a thought, reap an act; so an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character, sow a character and reap a destiny."

But as a new creation, we have the opportunity to sow good seeds in our field. To "sow to the Spirit" is the same as "to set the mind on the Spirit." Renew the mind with truth, renew the soul with prayer, corporate worship, and community. Guard your minds

and hearts by watching what media you consume, the company you keep, and the choices you make at work and at home.

I like the phrase starve the flesh and feed the spirit. Ruthlessly crucify the flesh and sow, protect, and feed the spirit. That's how the principle of reaping and sowing works to reap a character, a destiny, and a legacy. Then Paul moves from sowing to reap personal holiness, to sowing to reap a life of doing good.

Let us not become weary 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. vv. 9-10

These are some of the most encouraging words a Spirit-led person can hear when they are at the end of their rope when it comes to serving. Active Christian service is tiring. We are tempted to become discouraged, to slack off, even to give up. But Paul says, "if you persevere you will reap. Don't lose heart." Remember, we don't sow and reap on the same day.

To quote the band The Byrds:

To everything (turn, turn, turn)/There is a season (turn, turn, turn)/And a time for every purpose, under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die/A time to plant, a time to reap...A time for peace, I swear it's not too late.

A harvest may look like bringing comfort and assistance to our neighbors in need. It may lead someone to repentance and salvation.

Paul finishes his thoughts by bringing it back to the church. Our first responsibility is to the household of God. Charity begins at home. A harvest may look like bringing unity through loving confrontation; it may be you encouraging those who are fearful, discouraged, depressed, anxious, and traumatized. It's our responsibility for our season, and God will not be mocked.

So here is what we have seen so far in Chapter 6: gently restore (v. 1), bear one another's burdens (vv. 2-5), generously share (v. 6), practice the principle of sowing and reaping (vv. 7-10). As we can see, we can't fulfill Paul's call to practical spirituality while sitting on a 50-foot pole.

And here we arrive at the end of the letter. Paul is a big person with a big personality, and then he writes this in verse 11. *"See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" (v. 11).* I imagine a crowd gathering together, and someone stands up to read Paul's letter for the first time. And when the reader reaches verse 11, he stops and holds up the papyrus and says, "See, here is Paul's signature in big letters. Paul wrote it."

Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to

be circumcised so that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. vv. 12-13

Paul is saying, let me tell you the real reason these false teachers push for you to be circumcised. It is so they can avoid persecution themselves because we should never forget that the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ offends the world's sensibilities.

They boast when one more person gets circumcised. They are not looking at the heart of a person. They are not honest about their own hearts either. This is self-righteousness. And self-righteousness is a powerful distraction from the gospel. The gospel's power to save comes when one humbly looks to the cross for their salvation. I never realized the extent of this weird obsession these guys had to boast about circumcision. The church should be counting souls; these guys count foreskins. Now then, listen to what Paul boasts about.

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. vv. 14-15

Paul says, "I boast in what counts. I boast in the new creation that was established by God through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. *"Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God" (v. 16).*

Boast Only in the Cross

What does it mean to boast in the cross? It means refusing to boast about things that most people boast about, like popularity, income, or job performance. Just the symbol of the cross tells us so much. The cross in the days of Jesus was the ugliest thing imaginable. It was degrading, a symbol of horror, where the most evil people were punished. What would be a modern-day equivalent? To boast in an electric chair? Crazy.

But Paul says the cross is the only thing to boast about because it means that Christ loves us enough to die for us. It means we have been redeemed because Christ paid the whole price for our salvation. What does it look like to only boast in the cross? It means that I am to live my life for His pleasure, living for his approval, and embracing my new identity as a child of God.

Seek the Applause of God

"No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (Rom. 2:29). Paul is saying true Jews, truly spiritual people have the mark of circumcision on their hearts, not on their flesh. They are marked by the Holy Spirit, not by a knife. So praise from the world no

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

longer needs to be significant. The significance we crave is met through the praise of God. God fills the hole in our hearts.

So find encouragement in this:

The only pair of eyes in the universe that matter are God's.

The opinion of the world has no control over you. Who cares what they think?

Money is no longer your identity. It's just money, so give it away.

Our relationships are not your breath of life anymore, so don't melt when someone has a problem with you. Criticism doesn't have to derail you.

See what Jesus Christ did to get this for us. When we boast in the cross, we boast in him, justifying us through faith. Jesus was beaten and mocked, spit on, and jeered at on the cross. Someone put it this way, "Jesus Christ was jeered so we could get the applause of God." We know from the gospels that Jesus felt that his Father turned his back on him as our sins were dumped on him. Jesus bore the burden of hearing his Father say to him, "depart from me," so we could one day hear from our Lord, "Welcome to heaven! Well done, good and faithful servant."

"From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (v. 17). As Paul is strengthened by his new identity in Christ, he says to his opponents, "Don't cause me any more trouble, I bear the marks of Jesus. I bear the marks of beatings, being stoned, and left for dead. The Greek word for marks is stigmata. It's used as markings indicating ownership of slaves, which means he viewed his scars as marking him as a slave to Christ.

Often, we hear people refer to crosses they have to bear. I've heard it about someone with a cranky mother-in-law or a tough boss. I've even heard someone say their lousy golf swing is a cross to bear.

So, do we bear the marks of Jesus in our lives? Has our struggle to live out practical spirituality left marks? Do our calendars, appointments, and connections reflect the mark of Christ? We need to understand that living the Spirit-led life and being responsible members of the New Creation takes something from us. It requires sacrifice. Seasons may be painful, and yet he endured it all, becoming obedient to death, for our sake, and for our salvation.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen. (v. 18).

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