

No Other Gospel: Gospel Relationships

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[0 : 0 0] We just have two Sundays, this one and next in this book of Galatians, which has told us again and again and again, there's no other gospel, there's no other good news other than that God sent Jesus to save us as an act of his goodness, his kindness.

There's nothing that we do to earn or deserve the love of God. We freely receive it by faith. And now as we get to the end, let's think about how that gospel, how that message then influences friendships.

So we're going to think together about gospel friendships. So Galatians chapter 5 from verse 26, just to chapter 6 and verse 5.

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. 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 fulfil the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

[1 : 2 0] 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.

Okay, so let's think about the power of friendship for a few moments. Friendship is something that is celebrated in books.

Perhaps most famously, the Fellowship of the Rings, Lord of the Rings. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, perhaps, we read when we were younger. Friendship is there in so many of the TV shows that are important to our culture.

You know, Friends came back after a 20-year absence, and straight away it was number one on the Netflix most viewed watch list. Movies, Toy Story, a great story of Buzz and Woody.

And the great song, You've Got a Friend in Me. We love, we value friendship. And J.C. Ryle, a minister from another century, said, A true friend halves our troubles and doubles our joys.

[2 : 3 3] And I hope that's something that we have come to appreciate in our own lives. To have somebody there for us when we go through trouble and difficulty can be something that really gets us through.

To have somebody to share our joy and our celebration with It is a great gift from God. So we understand the power of friendship, but yet we're now being told that there is this epidemic of loneliness being reported in the West.

We have more social connections or more social platforms than ever before, but we seem to have less time for face-to-face or side-by-side friendships.

Many people today are feeling starved of that basic, wonderful experience of friendship. And that's sad because the Bible says we are made for friendship.

God made us and He made us for relationship with one another and also that we might enjoy friendship with God. So Paul takes us to the theme of friendship as he comes to the end of his letter.

- [3 : 52] And what he wants us to do is to discover the power of gospel friendship. So he talked to us last week about living by the Spirit. How does living by the Spirit, how does walking with God's Spirit, how does being united to the Lord Jesus transform our friendship?
- How does it help me to be a good friend? Sometimes we're very keen to find good friends and that's important, but here the emphasis is on how can I be a good friend?
- So if you have a person in your life who really cares about you, who helps you grow in your love for God, who you can share tough situations with, who will even call you out on sin in your life, then you have a gift to thank God for and a friend to be thankful to.
- But today our emphasis is on how can I be that kind of friend to somebody else? How can my knowing Jesus make me a better friend in the circle that I already have?
- And it's connected to the message of grace and it's connected to Jesus because a few times in this letter we have discovered Jesus as the true friend. In Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20 we're told by Paul that Jesus loved me and gave himself for me.
- [5 : 18] Here is the high point of friendship to self-sacrifice for the sake of another. And that's true for every Christian that God has freely loved us, sent his son Jesus to die for us so that we might enjoy friendship with God.
- So let's see from this little section how God's grace to us in Jesus frees us to be the kind of friends that bring joy and life to other people.
- And Paul begins with a heart attitude. The key to this kind of friendship is grace and not glory hunting.
- And we're going to see this in verse 26. Now let's read that again together. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.
- Okay, so this carries on straight after he's talked a lot about living by the Spirit. What's the evidence of God's Spirit at work in us? Well, one way that we see it is in terms of practical friendships where we love and care for other people.
- [6 : 26] And Paul here as he turns towards friendship and these kind of relationships, he's got a specific relationship in his mind. It's a gospel friendship where a shared experience of God's love and God's grace, where knowing Jesus is the foundation of that friendship, is the basis for relationships within the Christian church, where God's grace is the glue that sticks us together and that keeps us together.
- And this is to be a reality for church family life as we share God's grace together. And Paul kind of negatively addresses the heart attitude that lies behind, well, where problems and relationships come from, but by contrast where relationships can grow.
- So he says to them, let us not become conceited. Now, what does that word conceit refer to? It refers to a person who feels starved of honor or glory.
- And so life is being lived to pursue personal honor and glory. And so Paul is saying at a very basic level, you will not have a life-giving friendship where you are inclined towards sacrificing and seeking the good of others if you are primarily self-centered and concerned for your own glory and good ahead of that of others.
- And there's two ways, Paul says, that this attitude can show itself. He talks, first of all, in verse 26 about provoking each other. That word provoking is the idea of challenge and competition.
- [8 : 09] Here's me trying to show that I am superior to you. I am comparing to say that I am better than or worth more than another person.
- If provoking each other is not the basis for a stable friendship, but nor is envying. If provoking is all about I feel superior, envying is when we feel inferior.
- We look at others and we want what they have. I wish I had their gifts, their opportunities, their charisma, perhaps. And these are both examples of conceit.

Conceit, which is at base about glory hunting. I am either going to show that I am better than you or I wish that I was as good as you. And neither of these allow for a stable friendship to develop.

And the problem is because we are primarily self-absorbed. My thought is how do you make me feel, not how am I making you feel?

[9 : 12] And that's the emphasis that God wants us to have in our friendship to be for the other, not to be out for our own honor and glory.

So what's the opposite of glory hunting? What's the opposite of this conceit? Well, all through this letter we've been hearing the message of grace. And grace is what changes how we view ourselves.

Because when we hear the good news of God's grace, it provides for us that essential humility. Because it says to us, God loves us even while we were weak and lost and in need of rescue.

That our position in God's family is by grace alone. So there's no place for pride. So we're not thinking that we are superior. So it provides that humility.

But the gospel also provides a dignity. Perhaps we have an identity crisis where we're really insecure about ourselves. And the gospel says to us, remember, you are loved.

[10 : 16] You are valued. You are welcomed. You are accepted by the God of the universe. He is the one who approves of you. Who delights in you.

Therefore, you have a security in your life from God through Jesus. So grace changes in the first place how we view ourselves.

So now we're ready to move towards people to be a blessing, to be good news to them. But grace also changes how we view others. Whereas perhaps we might be inclined to compete and compare and contrast.

The gospel says that if somebody else loves Jesus, they're also a fellow child of God. We're in the same family. We have the same spiritual inheritance laid up for us in heaven.

That person that you might be tempted to compete with, that person has been saved by Jesus. Jesus loves and values that person. Therefore, we ought to also.

[11 : 24] And because grace gives us security, we are free to love and serve as we follow the example of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus gives us the one who we are told came from God and was returning to God and had all the power of God.

And yet in love, he stooped down low to wash his disciples' feet. Jesus gives us that example of what self-giving love looks like through his life.

And ultimately through his death on the cross. As in love, he pays the price for our sin. So that we might be brought to God. So the key to being a true friend then, according to Paul and according to this letter, is to believe this message of grace and regularly be preaching that message of grace to ourselves.

To keep us humble, to give us dignity, to give us that security to love others well. So if that's the heart attitude, then in the first five verses of chapter six, Paul begins to look at some of the practices of gospel friendships.

[12 : 40] So he's gone with the principle, the heart, the motivation. And now he considers the difference that the way of grace should make to our friendships. Let's read verse one again.

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.

So brothers or brothers and sisters, here's a reminder. These are patterns. These are attitudes for life in the church, life in the family of God. This is grace-centered friendship that we're thinking about here.

Perhaps you have in your house or you've seen in other people's houses those pictures that people maybe have in their kitchen. In this family, we do. And there's lots of different words that represent family values.

In this family, we do fun and we do laughter and we do sorry and we do forgiveness. You've probably seen them. I think Paul is giving us the beginning of a list of family values for God's family, for God's church here in chapter six.

[13 : 53] In God's family, what do we do? We do gentle restoration. In God's family, we do bearing others' burdens. In God's family, we do carrying our own load.

Because in God's family, we do great. And that's what we're going to think about for the rest of our time together. When you read the New Testament, you discover that when Jesus saves a person, he saves us to be connected not just to Jesus, but to one another.

The New Testament is full of one another. That we are called as followers of Jesus to love one another, to serve one another, to encourage one another, to speak the truth in love to one another, to honor one another above ourselves, which of course requires relationship.

Which of course requires that we would know others. That we'd be getting beyond the surface in our relationships with others. That we'd be making time to develop those kind of friendships so that we can do those one another's that God calls us to.

So again, in this church, we have opportunities in our community groups. We have opportunities in women's ministry and in student ministry and in prayer triplets to make those connections, those initial connections, so those relationships can go deeper, so that we can begin to carry out some of these practices.

[15 : 26] Well, the first practice in gospel friendship that Paul draws our attention to is this gentle restoration of verse 1. So again, last week we were thinking about living by the Spirit, and part of living by the Spirit is battling against sin in our life.

There's this constant conflict in our hearts between the new us, we are made new in Christ, and then the old nature that keeps wanting to drag us into sin.

And that was reminding us that in God's family, that sinful habits and lifestyles will be a constant danger, a constant presence among us. So what are we to do when that happens?

And how does grace help us to deal well with that situation? As Paul puts it here, somebody, if someone is caught in a sin, if a sinful pattern, if you're looking at the life of a brother and sister in Christ, and you see here is an unhelpful, a sinful pattern, a habit of life that's being displayed, what should we do?

Who is to help? What does it say in our text? First, you who are spiritual should provide help. Now, the way that's written, that might make it sound like there's some elite group in the church.

[16 : 48] Oh, it's the spiritual guys. They're the ones that help. Maybe we think of a minister or a group of elders. But no, to be spiritual simply means to be walking by the Spirit.

So if we're seeking to live in obedience, if we're seeking to grow, to be more like Jesus, if we're seeking to worship Him, then we have a responsibility to the people that God has placed around us in church, if we find them to be caught in a sin.

We are to do something about it. What are we to do? We should restore that person gently. The word restoration in the Greek gives us the idea of a bone that has been fractured.

Some of us know that feeling. It's a painful thing. If a bone is fractured and it needs to be reset, that's the word for restoration here. That's a process that is going to hurt, but it's a process that's going to bring healing.

And the healing that we want for our friend is that they would be right with God once again. They wouldn't be walking away from God. They'd be walking towards God in repentance and faith.

[18 : 03] So that's the goal. The goal is restoration. Now what's the attitude as we pursue that goal? The attitude is gentleness.

We restore gently. We are to watch ourselves or we also may be tempted. We are to move towards someone else, aware of our own weakness, aware of that danger that we have to be tempted to sin, showing grace to the other person because we know ourselves.

Not judging, not condemning. Paul says to us, gospel friend, look to restore people to a good relationship with God, looking to turn people away from sin.

And notice that what Paul doesn't do is he doesn't say, right, here's your 10-step process for how that should happen. What he does say is here's the heart behind that.

The attitude matters. So we don't go judgmental. I would never do something like that. Or how could you? If we move towards someone with that kind of attitude, that's not going to bring healing.

[19 : 15] We've maybe had that experience in family or in a friendship, and we know that it doesn't help. But the other thing that doesn't help is to be passive, to see someone in danger and say, well, you know, it's not my place to get involved.

Who am I? I could never do anything to help. I don't have that qualification. Both of those attitudes are unhelpful.

And what Paul is saying to us is that if we are to be a true friend, then we are by grace to move towards others with both humility and with boldness.

That we want to heal, we want to help, but we do that led by the Spirit as a fellow sinner, out of love for God and His honor, and out of a love for the person that we're moving towards.

That's the Spirit. That's the attitude that brings restoration. It comes from the gospel. In the gospel, we discover that Jesus came to restore us to friendship with God.

[20 : 30] The word the Bible uses for that is reconciliation. Reconciliation. Jesus comes to make peace between us and God. We are sinners. God is perfect and holy, and so there is a barrier between us.

And the only way that that barrier can be removed is if God in His loving kindness sends His own Son Jesus to take that sin and to satisfy God's justice against that sin at the cross so that we might be forgiven, that that barrier might be removed, so that we can know Him.

So that reconciliation then, Paul says in another letter, 2 Corinthians 5, that's to be our ministry. That's to be our friendship heart, that we want reconciliation.

We want to see people restored and walking with Jesus. So that's the first practice of Christian friendship that Paul mentions, gentle restoration.

The second practice we find in verses 2 and 3, and it's bear one another's burdens. Verse 2, carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

[21 : 41] If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Now the word for burdens there is the idea of a load that was never intended for one person by themselves to carry.

We know this experience. Imagine if you're moving house, for example. Now there's a lot of stuff that you can cart by yourself, depending on your strength and energy levels, but there are some things in every house that is more than a one-person job.

The sofa, the piano, the heavy dining room table. And this is the image. There are certain burdens in our life that we should not, because we cannot carry them by ourselves.

And God in his kindness puts other people around us, and so we are to shoulder that load with others. So what kind of burden are we to help someone else carry?

Well, I think what Paul has in mind is anything is a burden that might cause another person to lose their faith in Jesus or to lose their joy in Jesus.

[23 : 00] Now that could be absolutely anything. In verse one, he's given us the example of sin. Sin can cause someone to lose their faith and their joy in Jesus, and we are to carry that burden by praying and to look to restore them.

Temptation has that same function of drawing people away from faith and joy in Jesus. But it can also be the circumstances of life. Grief.

Unemployment. Long-term illness. The loss of a friend. Struggles in our studies. Any of those can become burdens for a person if it causes them to lose their faith, their hope, and joy in Jesus.

And we are to help another person who's struggling, and in so doing, we're told that when we carry those burdens, we will fulfill the law of Christ.

Now what does he mean when he says the law of Christ? Well, Jesus, when he was on the earth, was asked on different occasions to tell people what he thought was the most important command.

[24 : 12] And he said there's two. He said, love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. And in Galatians chapter five, and verse 14, Paul has already drawn our attention to that.

The entire law is summed up in a single command. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the law of Christ, because this is how Jesus Christ lived.

Always giving himself for the sake of others. Tired and wanting a rest, wanting time alone with his father or with his disciples, and seeing crowds come to him.

Sometimes he healed them. Sometimes he taught them. Sometimes he fed them. That was his pattern. That was his pattern to the end, when he gave his life for his friends to save us from our sin.

And so to love like Jesus, we are to both, as we have it in verse one, we are to love enough to confront sin in another person, and to give comfort in trouble to another person.

[25 : 25] Bearing one another's burdens has those two things. And then in verse three, there's that perhaps thing that seems a slight tangent.

If anyone thinks he's something when he's nothing, he deceives himself. How does verse three connect with verse two? If we put it simply, don't be high and mighty when someone else has a problem.

Don't think that you are above helping somebody else. Don't stand on ceremony. Don't wait for somebody else. You see there's a problem. Our call is to bear that person's burden.

Don't be above lending a hand. Don't be above showing care. Don't be above helping shoulder the load. Just as in any family and where there's lots to be done and adults and kids all muck in together.

So in a church family, we are to pitch in to help to bear one another's load. And we do that remembering the gospel of grace. We remember that Jesus came to bear our burden.

[26 : 32] We remember that Jesus came to die as the sin bearer of the world. We remember those words of Jesus. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

How does he do that? He gives us faith to trust in him, to look to him for strength when we feel weak. We rest by trusting that he does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

But he also gives us one another to share that burden. He uses people like us to provide rest for one another.

Bear one another's burdens. And then the last practice of gospel friendship that we have here, it seems contradictory at first, but hopefully we'll see it's not.

Carry your own load. Verses four and five. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else.

[27 : 42] For each one should carry his own load. So this time, it's not a burden. This time in verse five, it's a load. This is the idea of a person's day pack.

Think rucksack. Think about if you ever have said to your kids, carry your own school bag. That's the kind of picture that's in mind. What's Paul saying in these verses?

He's reminding them, he's reminding us, your life is not to be about comparing and competing. We are to remember that God has given to each one of us our own opportunities.

He's given us a unique set of gifts and relationships and strengths and weaknesses and challenges. And so we're not to be comparing, thinking, well, I'm doing better than that person.

I wish I was doing, we carry our own load. Morally too, what's our measuring stick for how we are doing in our obedience to God?

[28 : 47] Sometimes we can be tempted to look around and say, I'm doing okay because I'm not as bad as that person. So our measuring stick that we can use wrongly is another person. Whereas we should be using the law of Christ.

We should be seeking to grow in the fruit of the Spirit and concerning ourselves with what's going on in our own hearts and lives first of all. There's maybe also another surprise for us in verse four.

It says, each one should test his own actions, then he can take pride in himself. And that seems surprising because often the Bible says that pride is a bad thing.

So we need to understand what kind of pride does Paul have in mind here in our gospel friendships? Now we need to take this with verse 14 where we find Paul boasting.

chapter 6 verse 14, 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.

[29 : 58] So his boast is in Christ crucified. He's calling us to pride and boasting in God's grace at work in our lives to recognize that if we're able to do anything good for God, it's because God has given us grace.

So again, that keeps us humble and that keeps us thankful. And as we live lives that celebrate God's grace, it'll make you and I better friends because we'll be humbled of that human pride.

We'll have that dignity that will stop us envying and feeling really inferior. We'll have that security in the love of Jesus. And it's as we have that that we'll be able to pursue restoration to a good relationship with God in another person for the sake of a friend.

As we celebrate grace, we'll be renewed so that we will have energy to help bear the burdens of others. not just thinking about ourselves and our own issues.

That we'll carry our own load which includes our responsibility to be good friends to the people who are around about us. So as we wrap up, how can you and I become better friends?

[31 : 24] Specifically, how can we become better friends for the sake of Jesus? We know in our own lives that friendship matters. That friendship is a gift from God.

So it's something that we want to grow in. We want to develop as friends. So what kind of steps can we take towards that? Perhaps we can think about our schedules.

How do we use our time and how could we use our time to grow to develop this kind of friendship where Jesus is at the center where we're investing in someone else for their good?

Perhaps we can be deliberate about our use of meal times. Share a lunch with somebody. Meet someone for breakfast or have a family round for dinner. Perhaps if you like walking you could go for a walk with someone with the aim of talking about stuff that matters.

Maybe you can take a little bit of time to send a text or a note or an email to encourage someone in their faith to affirm them and to be thankful for the gifts that you see in your life.

[32 : 42] Friendship is something that's so important and life is so busy that perhaps we just simply need to block out time in our calendars so that we can be developing and growing friendships.

So we can think about our schedules. Perhaps we can also think about our conversations. Now for some of us the challenge is how can we get friendships to go deeper than weather and sport and work and the usual things?

Maybe we need to think about before we meet somebody what thoughtful questions could I ask to discover more about their family or their work situation or what struggles that they're having.

and when we hear that to find out how they're feeling how they're doing in their walk with God in the middle of that. Perhaps we could talk about God's word together.

Here's what I was reading in the Bible and it spoke to me about this. Perhaps we could talk about good books that we're reading. Maybe we need to learn to give affirmation and encouragement in a culture where maybe we're not that good at it.

[33 : 49] Especially for guys that's not naturally where we go. But biblically we're told all over the place to encourage others and so maybe that's something that we need to develop in our conversations.

But it all starts with our heart. Am I a friend of Jesus? Has he taken my burden of sin?

Has he restored me to rightness with God? And since he's been such a friend to me and continues to be such a friend to me how can I then be a friend to others?

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