

Why We Do the Things We Do

St. Mark Lutheran
Two services

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Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness...Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself...And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are the household of faith. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ... Galatians 6:1-14 (various passages)

A couple of weeks back, I stood up here and said we are in a great spiritual war. I made reference to the horrendous attack in Orlando. On a larger scale, I am sure most of us are aware of the intent and threat of ISIS in regard to Christianity. We are probably all agreed that these are manifestations of spiritual warfare.

But we must not overlook that the same spiritual warfare can manifest itself among us. It shows itself in other ways. Sometimes Christians fall into sin. This is unchangeable fact. Temptation can sweep a person off his feet and leave his life in chaos.

Today we study the last chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. The Apostle Paul is quoted in verse one as saying, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

God wants us to make an effort to restore a fallen brother. We are to try to reconcile him to God and to his church. We are to try to help him get on his feet again. Paul also said this to the church at Corinth as recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, which says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." This can also be called restoration.

Trying to restore another Christian is our responsibility, but it's a touchy task. We can't help wondering how the person will respond. Will he be irritated or become angry? Sometimes we fear being rejected, and we sidestep our responsibility. Yet God wants the fallen one restored, and he often chooses us to be the restorer. If we are not willing to prayerfully handle the situation, then we should seek out someone who is.

Yes, restoration is often risky. But If someone is caught up continually in a serious sin, and we are not willing to take the risk to help him, we are leaving him in the clutches of that sin. It not only can destroy him, but it can have a destructive influence on others.
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How do we help restore a brother? The Holy Scriptures are "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path". The Bible is more than a book filled with theological revelations. It is also a manual for everyday life. First on the list, of course, is to pray for wisdom and guidance for yourself. Second, I would search the Scriptures for a couple of key passages to use if the opportunity presents itself. Personally, I don't believe in going to see people and knocking them over the head with Bible passages. But we can tell them our concerns and ask if we can be of help. If they are open to help, and the visit is going well, then quotes from the Holy Scriptures can be a great help and allow the Holy Spirit to do his work. They should relate to the particular sin that the person is caught up in.

But remember that we are a church which ministers with BOTH the Law and the Gospel. So, I would also learn or write down some Gospel passages in regard to repentance and confession, again to use if the situation calls for it. 1 John 1:9 is one good example: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Restoration is personal work. It should be done face-to-face. E-mails, telephones, and letters do not usually work well for this. Notice what our text says about "a spirit of gentleness". The restorer should have a humble and gentle attitude. You should keep your talk to a minimum and avoid lecturing. This is not the time for heavy-handed condemnation or displaying an air of superiority, and watch your body language. You are coming alongside a brother or sister to help them. You should not have a part in gossip about the situation nor should you be giving the person the "cold shoulder" because you disapprove of their lifestyle. Remember, the goal is to restore them, not to drive them away.

Now our text this morning also directs us to "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Many of these situations may not be involved in some serious sin. A brother may be ill, or upset, or worried as he faces some problem in his life that really has him down. Sometimes we find a way we can help, but many times we can not. None of us has the solution to every problem. But every one of us should be able to listen. Being a good listener and caring can be of help. We can continue to give support to show that we care. If you are comfortable doing it, say a prayer for the person before you leave. Keep in touch. Just the fact that you care and are praying for someone is a help.

Most of us would probably agree that bearing one another's burdens is the Christian thing to do. But here is a question for you: "Why do we do the things we do?" Do we do them because that makes us a good Christian? Do we do them to impress others with how good we are? Do we do them because we really have it all together, and we should be able to help those who don't have it all together? Do we do them because we think there will be some sort of payback to us in our life? If we do them for any of these reasons, we are doing them for the wrong reason.

The fact is the only way we should do what we do for someone else is because of Someone Else. That Someone Else, Jesus Christ, has freed us from thinking about ourselves and caring only about ourselves. We are a new creation in Jesus Christ. Galatians 6:14-16 instructs us, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

If we back up to Galatians 2:20, Paul says the same thing in another way. He says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." We do what we do for someone else because Jesus Christ has done what he did for us. The world is there but less important to us, because our focus is on the cross of Jesus Christ. In love, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we forgive our brothers what they have done wrong, we bear their burdens, and we work to help them back up when they have fallen.

I found this closing story in a couple of sermons I read in preparing for this message. I don't know who the author is, and I have altered it slightly:

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

A subjective person came along and said before leaving, "I feel for you down there"

A Pharisee came by and said, 'Only bad people fall into pits.'

A news reporter showed up and offered to write an exclusive story on "Life in the Pit".

A psychologist noted as he passed by, "Your mother and father are to blame for your being there."

A Christian Scientist observed, "The pit is just in your mind."

A fire-and-brimstone preacher announced "You deserve your pit."

Jesus came by. Seeing the man, he took him by the hand, and lifted him out of the pit.

Amen.

