

A church committed to discipleship

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Date: 30 July 2023

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[0 : 00] Galatians chapter 5. You, my brothers, you were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature. Rather, serve one another in love.

The entire law is summed up in a single command. Love your neighbour as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious.

The acts of the spirit, sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

[1 : 09] I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the spirit, let us keep in step with the spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are sinful 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 with somebody else. For each one should carry his own load.

[2 : 21] Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Thank you. Great. Thank you, David.

Now, keep that passage open because we're going to work our way through it. I'm going to move that plant because otherwise... That will be on the YouTube video forever and ever and ever, and that's the only thing people will look at.

There you go. I wonder as we start if I can ask you a question. And the question is this. What is your most significant contribution to West Kilburn Baptist Church?

In other words, what is it that you do, or if you're new here or you're just visiting this morning, what is it that you could do or that you do in your church that has the biggest blessing to the life of the church together?

What is the most significant contribution to our effort to revitalize the ministry of the gospel here that you can make? What is it? Maybe, you know, you're thinking maybe it's the money that I could give.

[3 : 26] Maybe it's the rotors that I could join. Maybe I've got particular perceptive insights at church members meetings, that ability to spot the mistakes that everyone else is making.

Maybe I've got years of experience in church and church leadership. Maybe I've got great musical skill or a friendship network that means I can be inviting others to come to church every single week.

Maybe it's that you're a preacher. What is it? Well, I want to suggest to you from this passage that we've just read that for all of us, including for me this morning, our most significant contribution to the life of the church here is a personal commitment to grow as a Christian.

To put the same thing the other way around, it doesn't matter what you do here. It doesn't matter if you have thousands of pounds to give or hundreds of volunteer hours to pour in.

It doesn't matter if you can preach brilliant sermons. If I am not and you are not growing as a Christian, then in a profound sense, we are not helping the church.

[4 : 37] We're not. Here's the point, as bluntly as I can put it. If I don't grow, the church will die. If I don't grow, the church will die.

Now that's a massive claim, isn't it? So I want to first prove that to you from the passage, and then I'm going to give you six points, don't worry, they're not long, about discipleship and Christian growth from the passage.

So here we go. If I don't grow, the church will die. In a moment, I'm going to try and explain to you a little bit more about Paul's freedom language in the passage. But his big point here, having explained over and over again, and super clearly to the Galatian churches, that they can only be saved from God's wrath and future judgment by faith alone in Christ alone, he's now telling them that that life of faith has a particular shape.

It looks like something that needs to be lived. And it's lived out, he says, in a collective commitment to personal discipleship. And you see that because you see the alternative painted in these verses. Look at verse 15. He says, this is the alternative to living the life of faith. He says, if you bite and devour each other, watch out or you'll be destroyed by each other. Or again, down in verse 21, I warn you, he says, as I did before, that those who live like this, having listed the ways of the flesh or the sinful nature, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[6 : 06] Or again, in chapter 6, verses 7 and 8, just beyond the passage that we read, do not be deceived, he says. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh or their sinful nature, from the sinful nature or the flesh, will reap destruction.

Whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. These are hugely strong words that Paul is using, aren't they? In fact, in chapter 5, verse 15, if you look back at that, those are the Greek words used to describe wild animals in deadly battle.

They bite, they devour, and they destroy one another. And the point is clear that for us, even as Christians this morning, there remain in our hearts ungodly, fleshly desires, motives and practices, that if we don't work hard to put them to death, they will destroy not only us as individuals, but also us as a local fellowship.

We need to be really serious about this, don't we? The truth is, if we are not committed to personal discipleship, as individuals in a church, we're not committed to putting to death these desires and habits of our old sinful nature, then it doesn't matter what else we do.

It doesn't matter how spectacular the church looks, the church will die. Because in our sinfulness, we will eat one another up, bite and devour one another.

[7 : 35] Maybe even perhaps showing that we were never Christians in the first place, and so reap destruction. I know there's a balance here, and I don't want to overstate it, so I want to get it right.

But listen, understanding God's sovereignty, knowing that we absolutely rely on the work of his spirit, knowing with confidence that the life of our church is in God's hands and not ours, rightly understand that, still there is a right sense in which the future of West Kilburn Baptist Church rests on our personal willingness to fight anger, envy, sexual immorality, pride, gossip, slander and the like.

So much so, that when you're on your own at home, when I'm on my own at home, on my knees before the Lord, asking for his help to fight sin and love Jesus, there, in those moments, I am serving West Kilburn Baptist Church in the most useful way.

Because if I don't grow, the church will die. That means, doesn't it, that this morning's sermon, it's serious, isn't it? And it's personal. It's both those things.

It's serious and it's personal. And I've been praying, as I've been preparing this week, that the Lord might use our time together around his word, just to shake us all up a little bit in this area. So let me try and give you six instructions on Christian grace from the passage.

[8 : 56] And then after lunch, stay for lunch. And after lunch, you'll have a chance to ask questions and for us to discuss it together in more detail. First thing is this. Growth comes from freedom and makes me a slave.

Growth comes from freedom and makes me a slave. Now, this first point is a little theological, but it's vital. So get your brain in gear, look down at your passage and let's try and work this out

together.

Look down at verse 13. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free, he says. Is the clicker no longer working? There you go.

That's it. You can go sit down now for a bit. Just sit on the front row. That'll work. No one else will ever want to do the clicker, will they now?

Look down at verse 13. They say, You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. Rather, serve one another humbly in love.

[9 : 55] For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command. Love your neighbor as yourself. That little phrase there, called to be free, is really important.

It's working as a summary of what Paul has been saying so far in his letter to the Galatians. So the Galatian Christians are saved from hell for glory, not by their own good actions, not even by their own commitment to personal growth and godliness.

Rather, they are saved by the death of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of his blood, which he says has set them free. Free from the condemnation which they deserve from a holy God, given them a new life which they could never have earned.

How this works is that becoming a Christian involves being united with Jesus. So Jesus, when we talk as Christians about Jesus dying for us, it's not him dying for us in a sort of abstract sense, as if it's legal fiction.

You know, God's sort of playing some legal hocus pocus whereby someone else just takes our punishment randomly. Now, actually, what the Bible says is we are included in Christ. So as a Christian, Christ on the cross is taking my sin on himself and bearing the punishment for it.

[11 : 08] And I receive his righteousness. If you look back at Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20, just go back a few pages in your Bible, Galatians chapter 2 verse 20, Paul summarizes it like this.

He says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Being a Christian involves the death of an old life and a new life being lived, a life of faith. Now, coming back to chapter 5, and Paul is assuming by this point in his letter that we all know that.

And he's explaining now how having been set free from sin and the wrath of God, having been united with Christ, what do these new lives of faith look like? He says, verse 14, these lives are informed by the law.

God's moral law in the Old Testament, a law which is summarized in its ethics by that instruction from Leviticus repeated by Jesus, which says, love your neighbor as yourself. So here it is, you have been called by God to the freedom of salvation.

[12 : 15] And that freedom is lived out in love for others, he says. If you look at the end of verse 13, how is that freedom expressed? Well, we don't indulge the flesh. That's what we're free from.

Instead, we serve, or literally, slave ourselves to one another. Let me try and illustrate it, if I can. Imagine it like this. Imagine you have a child who loves to sing.

They love to sing. But the problem is, they have a terrible, terrible voice. And every time this child tries to sing, you know, the cat starts screaming, the glasses break, the neighbors are banging on the ceiling, and kicking in your door.

They love to sing, but they have been born with a terrible voice, and they are a slave to this terrible voice. They can't change it. It's ruining everything. You're no longer friends with your neighbors anymore.

There's not a glass in your house that's intact, because they've all been shattered by the voice of this desperate, singing child who's ruining everything. You've got a constant headache. So at great expense, you call London's finest doctor, and you arrange for your child to have a miracle operation, whereby their voice box is swapped out and removed, and they are given Ariana Grande's voice box instead, so that they sing like her and not themselves.

[13 : 40] Now, Jen told me this week that none of you would know who Ariana Grande is, but some of you do, and if you don't, you can ask the children when they come back in. Now, think about it. After all that expense for your child to swap their voice box out for another one, what is it that you want your child to do more than anything when they get home?

What is it that you want them to do? You want them to sing, don't you? That's what you want them to do. Not to pay you back for the operation, not even because if they don't sing, it means the operation wasn't successful.

Rather, you want them to sing because that's what it was all about in the first place, isn't it? That was the purpose for which you have been working. Now, the same with being a Christian.

Everyone in this room, including me, without the Lord's miraculous intervention, are the spiritual version of a cat-screaming, glass-breaking, chaos-bringing sinner.

We create in our actions many outposts of hell as we shut God out of our lives and live our own self-destructive desires. I'm battered by the self-destructive desires of others so that none of us are capable in our own strength of living a life that pleases God.

[14 : 56] Every time we open our mouths, it comes out as a screech, which means all of us need an action of the Lord Jesus, a miraculous action of the Lord Jesus, actually, received by faith in response to his calling where he can transform us from the inside out, taking our sin, giving us a new life.

not Ariana Grande's, but Jesus' life, life by the Spirit, a life which loves to love others above itself, a life which loves to obey God's moral law above its own desires, not because it has to, but because it was made to.

It's what it wants to do, not because it must do, but because it loves to. And so that's Christian growth. It's not earning credit with God so that he somehow owes us stuff. Rather, it's living the new life that he's given us, being who we now are in Christ, which is a servant of love towards one another.

It is singing with the new voice that God has given us, and he's given it to us for that purpose that we might sing. Now that means, doesn't it, this morning, we need to ask ourselves, before we consider anything else about growing as a Christian, you need to ask yourself, I need to ask myself, am I really a Christian?

Have I really experienced that? And if you're not a Christian this morning, it's so good you're here. I'm really pleased to have you this morning. But I want to be really clear with you.

[16 : 20] You don't become a Christian by living a Christian life. That's not how it works. Rather, you live a Christian life because you have been made a Christian by the Lord Jesus, by faith in him.

And then if you ask yourself, well, how can I tell if I've actually put my faith in Jesus? How can I tell if I've been made a Christian by Jesus? Well, you can tell because you have this overwhelming desire to live like him and to love like him because the new Christian life longs to be lived.

And if those desires are not there, don't try and rustle them up on your own. Rather, come back to the Lord Jesus and say, listen, Lord Jesus, please have mercy on me and give me a heart that loves you and longs to live for your glory.

I can't earn your favor or deserve your kindness. Please hear my prayer and transform me. So that's the first point. Growth comes from freedom and makes me a slave. Secondly, we're going to move a bit more quickly.

Growth is war. Growth is war. Let's notice this quickly. Growing as a Christian will feel like war. Not a war with other people, but an internal war, a war with what Paul calls the desires of the flesh or the desires of the sinful nature in verse 16.

[17 : 35] Listen to his explanation, verse 17. Look down at your Bibles. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh or the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want. Surely this is all of our experiences if we're a Christian this morning, that living the Christian life turns out to be way more difficult than we thought.

not so much because those around us make us difficult, although they do at times, but because actually within me rages this battle with the desires of my sinful nature against what I now want to do as a Christian.

So much so that the growth of our local church is the lived out experience of this transforming work of Christ is hard. because at one fundamental level the work of growing as a Christian involves not doing what you want to do.

Do you get that? It means deliberately ignoring the desires of the flesh. An athlete won't compete at the highest level if they don't kill that desire for an extra donut.

[18 : 46] Or a great musician won't perform the best if they don't fight that desire to watch TV instead of practicing. So as a Christian this morning we won't grow unless we double down in war against a whole set of desires that would ruin our Christian lives if we let them.

You know, if your Christian life, if I can put it like this, if your Christian life this morning is largely shaped around doing whatever it is that you just want to do, if you come to church when you feel like it or you read your Bible when you want to or if you pray when you're in the mood, well then let me tell you you're losing the war.

You're losing the war. Because the Christian life is a war, a battle against a whole set of desires which if we let them flourish will ruin our Christian lives. Thirdly, growth is seen in relationship with others.

This is Paul's list in verses 19 to 21. It's worth looking at again. Let me read it to you. The acts of the flesh are obvious. He says, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.

I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. This then is the battleground of the Christian life. This if you like is the psalm of discipleship or the D-Day beaches of Christian growth.

[20 : 18] It's personal relationships. Personal relationships. This is where the battle for Christian growth and life is the hardest. And on the one hand you notice it's for sexual purity.

That's where the battleground is. Sexual immorality, the word that's translated like that in our Bibles is the Greek word porneia. It's a catch-all word that covers not just what we might consider the worst sexual sins but it covers all sexual activity outside of the marriage of one man to one woman. And Paul is saying that for all of us every one in this room our flesh will push against and fight that version of purity. All of us in our flesh will long to deviate from God's version of sexual purity in a myriad of ways.

None of us will ever only want what God wants for us sexually. And there will be a war a war against impurity fighting the desire for porneia in all its forms whether it's the longing for pornography whether it's flirting with someone I'm not married to whether it's hooking up for casual sex whether it's taking part in gay sex sexual purity is not the battle of the few it's the battle of us all. Paul says it might have a slightly different shape for each of us but none of us are free from this and even age doesn't take it away.

[21 : 42] You will not grow out of this because says Paul this is the battle ground of Christian growth and it's a controversial one isn't it? Because our world has a very different view of sexual purity to God.

we don't have time to go through the list in lots of detail but you'll notice that most of the other words in this list are also relational not sexual relationships but just all relationships we're tempted to envy and to anger to be ambitious to get ahead of one another in other words it's not just disordered sexual desire that will be a challenge for our Christian growth but also a wrong sense of being in competition with one another in church that feeling that the success of others is my failure or that church is a place where I accumulate power by taking it off other people all of that is wrong it's like being given a new voice but insisting on singing out of tune in the voice that breaks stuff but let me try and land this really specifically for us this morning if I can in a church revitalization like ours it is likely that relational hurt and trouble in the church is something we're just going to have to face up to and deal with because all of us in the room will have at times behaved in ways that are touched on in this list here a church under stress is bound to experience that even more than normal and if we don't address that if we don't repent of that and seek reconciliation with one another and learn to sing with our new voices then we won't grow as Christians and if we won't grow as Christians the church will die because my individual

Christian growth is my vital contribution to the fellowship here and you will see that Christian growth where primarily in my relationships with others that's where you'll see it so listen this morning perhaps there's someone in church that you need to say sorry to perhaps there's even someone who has left the church who you need to say sorry to maybe there's a relationship that needs to be repaired maybe there's a bitter root that needs cutting out well don't delay and don't put it off because we all need you to do that because Christian growth is seen in relationships with others fourthly then growth is beautiful growth is beautiful there's obviously lots that we could say about the list of the fruits of the spirit and I know we touched on this earlier I think it for a start it's a really brilliant illustration of how Christ's work on the cross transforms our personal godliness it's way better than my voice illustration because although fruit on a tree is inevitable isn't it it comes as a result of being a fruit tree still the great thing about this illustration is that the fruit comes slowly even

if it's inevitable so

Christian growth comes slowly requires cultivation and pruning even probably also significant I think that Paul calls this a singular fruit with lots of different aspects so you're not to think that there's lots of different fruits the fruit of love joy peace patience kindness goodness self-control but actually there is one fruit which is itself love joy peace patience kindness goodness self-control so these things are describing the one thing but I want us to see just briefly at the end of verse 23 what he says there look at it with me what does he say against such things there is no law now that just might sound an obvious point but the point seems to be not only does the fruit of the spirit fulfill this law to love others that we saw at the beginning but also that there's a universal beauty and obvious commendability to this fruit no one has anything to say against it they can't so that for us as a church this commitment to grow as Christians to be disciples of the Lord Jesus and to follow his way to live pleasing him that will bring about something beautiful in the life of our church something beautiful in its fruit of peace and patience and kindness and goodness a group of people who don't fly off the handle when things go wrong who are kind and forbearing with gentle and full of peace who don't moan or gossip or slander who are not jealous of the gifts of others wanting them for themselves they're not envious of them wishing that they weren't so good but are self-controlled do you see this is the opposite of what the flesh produces do you notice this our fleshly desires the desires of our sinful nature in the end kill us and destroy those around us our fleshly desires are uncontrolled a taste a foretaste of hell itself but the fruit of the spirit builds the sort of place that everyone longs to be don't you long to be in a place of peace and patience and kindness and goodness and self-control that is a taste of glory growth is beautiful fifthly growth requires membership of a church jumping over to chapter six and you can see that Paul's assumption here is that it takes a church to grow a

Christian so first in verse one Paul's assumption is that in the life of a church people will sin and will be caught in sin so even in a healthy church we're not to assume that it will be sinless that's unrealistic isn't it this side of glory but when people are caught in sin the church are not to make them pay for it they're not to make an example of them but neither are they to ignore them instead we're told they're to seek to restore them and to do so gently now we don't have time to go into all the details of this but this is really talking about church discipline which is church discipleship it's the idea that the body of the church is involved in the life of its members seeking to restore sinning members to the fellowship by gently encouraging them to repent and turn back to the Lord Jesus creating together a community where repentance is normal and notice this isn't just the leaders doing this the passage doesn't say listen if someone in the church is caught in sin drag them to the leaders and let them tell them off it doesn't say that does it no this is brothers and sisters in the church this is the the whole church working together who together seek to restore the church member whilst also verse two being very conscious that they themselves are tempted by exactly the same things now there are some really practical implications of this aren't there it means that if you're a member of the church here and let me say if you're a

[28 : 09] Christian this morning you've been baptized and this is your spiritual home you should be a church member right a membership of the local church is an invitation to the church to say listen church hold me accountable for my statement of faith in Jesus Christ gently restore me when you catch me sinning do it quickly and early please hold me to account if I stop attending in other words as members of a church in our faithfulness to live the Christian life is not just a personal matter it's a corporate one because and this is it one of the best tools that God has given us to grow us as Christians and that this includes me as well as all of us is the love prayers and gentle correction of the church fellowship that's what it's there for it's a tool given to us by God to grow us as Christians the church membership if you like is like driving a stake in the ground and saying listen I stand here in faith in Jesus

Christ I want to live for him I want to live a life that pleases him I want to live for his glory I'm driving this stake into the ground now in my membership of the local church but I know my heart and I'm likely to wander away so please if you see me wandering away bring me back to the stake that I've driven in the ground here will you please I know we're all fellow strugglers growth requires membership of a local church that we might call one another to account finally then growth requires personal responsibility now without contradicting anything that we've just said Paul comes on to be very clear that while the church seeks to disciple one another brothers and sisters working together still verses four and five we are each responsible for ourselves look at verse four each one should

test their own actions that's what you should be doing this morning then they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else for each one should carry their own load well so for you and me this morning the church is not ultimately to blame for any lack of growth in my Christian life I am and I need not to look around others and think well I might not be doing great as a Christian this morning but I'm sure doing better than they are so I must be okay no I'm not to do that rather I'm to look to carry my own burden and seek before the Lord to grow as a Christian myself looking at the plank in my eye before thinking about the speck in everyone else's and I do that because I know that if I don't grow as a Christian the local church will die because our sinfulness will kill it as we devour one another so let's return to where we started what can you do to serve the church here what will help us revitalise the work and witness of our church family well here it is this is what you can do you can get on your knees and pray commit yourself again to growing as a Christian to live the godly life that God has given you in the gospel to commit to membership of the fellowship that we might pray these prayers together for one another and if all of us will do that together well then church life will be a taste of future glory and it will be brilliant but if we won't do it our church will die let me pray for us maybe take a moment just to think and reflect on our own and then I'll close in prayer heavenly father it's remarkable to us that you would put something as precious as the local church in our hands and give us this opportunity to contribute to it by growing as Christians and Lord as we look at our lives we see really clearly our failures in this area and so we say again individually and corporately please restore us we turn from our sin and we turn to Christ we ask for your help to live life by the spirit not led by the flesh we pray that our church life together might be a taste of glory we know that these characteristics here are very counter-cultural so please we pray make us an outpost of future glory that others might see something beautiful and wonderful here that's not done by us it's done by you as we sing life with these new voices that you've given us as we pray in Jesus name amen amen thank you so much for