

“Ready To Lend A Hand”**Galatians 6: 1-10****Rev. Ed Hoekstra**

Live creatively and do not judge! How quick or how slow are you ready to lend a hand to someone who needs help? It is very easy to judge someone, especially if you do not know anything about them. It takes more creativity to not judge, listen and discern what is going on with the individual who has a problem. A long Christian value to ‘...*not judge so that you may not be judged*’ (Matthew 7:1-3) has always been a teaching of Jesus in our churches though I have heard people say that they cannot enter a church because they feel they will be judged. The message of Jesus is not to judge others! Everyone is to be welcomed by God’s grace. Not one person is better than another!

It appears that a judgmental attitude was occurring inside the Galatian church and Paul was addressing it: **6 My friends,^[a] if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.** Live with humility. Humility is the core from which one grows spiritually. The Greek word translated as ‘gentleness’ is also translated as ‘humility’. C.S. Lewis said this about humility: “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” The Pharisees (the religious leaders and teachers of the law in the Old Testament) were the example of arrogance. Jesus was overwhelmingly gentle, but had the most criticism of Pharisees because they treated others as inferior and they took advantage of those who were vulnerable.

Spiritual arrogance was (and is) a problem within the church. Paul was addressing those who were in the church, but at the same time were influenced by the culture. The Galatians were part of the Greek culture where high regard was put on the acquisition of knowledge (gnosis). Central to gnostic belief was that typically secret knowledge from angels, the stars and planets was the way to holiness and even salvation. They thought that the path to redemption was through knowledge and the worst evil was ignorance.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatian church because church members were ignoring the true gospel and embracing a false one (Galatians 1: 6, 7). Early in the book (letter), Paul needed to make his credentials clear to those he was addressing. Paul said that his preaching did not have its origin in a man (as Gnostic ideas do), but had originated directly from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1: 11, 12). Those who were knowledgeable were revered above others in Galatian society at the expense of love and humility (gentleness) towards one another. Paul was compelled to address this. In I Corinthians 13:2 Paul stated, “*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mystery and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*” One would then say that true Spirituality is rooted in the humble act of love – where one puts themselves aside for the sake of others. Those rooted in the spirituality of God’s grace (God’s love) are ready and desire to help those who are in need.

² Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill^[b] the law of Christ. Paul comes up with this command. Love is, after all, an act of your will – if love is not an action and merely a feeling, then it is not love (*love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast...* I Cor. 13). The law of Christ is to love. Was the act of love encouraged to earn salvation – no of course not! Loving others is itself grace which is originally poured in us by the Holy Spirit so we can freely dispense it to others. This ‘law of Christ’ was so

important that Paul used the word law in a healthy sense – to liberate ourselves and others and not to subdue.

⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. God knows all things. God's nature is love – it is the law of the universe. We can accomplish tremendous things in this life, but if these things are not cultivated and planted in love-it will not produce very much. This may sound direct, harsh and judgmental, but I believe was given to make the point clear that grace (unconditional love) must undergird – must be foundational in all we do.

Jesus was very direct in addressing the Pharisees. He was so against their hypocrisy that he called them 'whitewashed tombs' as recorded in Matthew 23: 27, 28: ²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. ²⁸ So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”*

The question came up in the Bible study about how do Christians know when to be gentle and when to speak out strongly against sin and injustice. I believe the answer is that we are called by Christ to regularly practice our faith by approaching with gentleness (humility) when we talk to someone about their sin (transgression). This is to be done in prayer and trust in the Holy Spirit giving you the words to say. This is to be done with the knowledge that no one person is superior to another. In humility as a follower of Christ, we also know we are saved by grace and are subject to daily temptations. In our practice of gentleness with our children, our family and others, we become more equipped with the help of the Holy Spirit to be gentle. However, we all know there is a time where one needs to be firm and speak directly to sinful behaviour. In my life I have been approached mostly in a gentle way but at times in direct way. When I was approached in a direct way – (usually by my parents and family) they often needed to do so, especially if I wasn't paying attention when spoken to in a gentle way.

⁹ So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. If we do it on our own strength we get burned out and lose desire. When we do it with others with the strength of the Spirit, the wind is at our back.

¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. Are some people more important than others? The answer is that no one is better than another. However, I believe that Paul is saying here that the body of Christ must be strong before it is fully ready to go out and help others. If one part is ill the whole body suffers (I Corinthians 12: 26). This does not mean that we do not help others outside of our church family at the same time (it is important that we are ready in Christ's love to respond to a need as he did when he walked the earth). I believe this verse is instructive in the sense that just as our own body falls ill from time to time, it is important that our body gets rest and we allow it time to be restored before we can be fully ready to lend a hand. We do not want to grow weary from doing what is right. We are stronger together as the body of Christ.

Leave margins in your life! Sometimes we cram out schedules so full, that there is little room to meet unexpected urgent request. As followers of Christ, we are to be ready to lend a hand and put the other responsibilities on hold for a while. Pray that the Lord may give you the grace and freedom to respond attentively in love when called upon. Amen.