

Pako Morning Service: 29/05/2016

Welcome. Prayer. Greeting. Congregation, our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Singing: 171 "Stand up and bless the Lord"

Law. Psa 103. Prayer of confession.

Singing: BoW: 103b vv 1,2,3,5; "O Come my soul..."

Offering: Local Church & MAMA

Singing: "Speak O Lord" Prayer.

Scripture Reading: John 21:15-25; Gal 6:1-5; Chris.

Sermon: "Being truly Spiritual"

Singing: BoW 451 "Make me a channel"

Benediction: "May the grace of Christ our Saviour, and the Father's boundless love, with the Holy Spirit's favour, rest upon us from above"

Singing: BoW: 523 Glory be to the Father

Congregation, one of the blessings of living in today's world is that many people like to be spiritual. But according to Scripture what does that mean?

Some people think that to be spiritual means going to a certain place, having some time out, and meditating all by yourself. They don't like being distracted by the world and material things around them.

The eastern type religions are full of spiritualism. Yoga for instance is described as a physical, mental and spiritual practice or discipline which originated in India, possibly having its roots in Hinduism.

In the western world, Yoga is probably seen more as some physical exercise, however in Indian traditions, it has a meditative and spiritual core and one could even ask whether it is right for Christians to be involved in it.

In many book stores you will find all sorts of books on spirituality. Some are about near death experiences, others speak about being to heaven and hell and back again.

Heaps of people are into spiritualism, yet many don't wish to associate it with religion. Some like it this way

for it allows them to be whatever they want to be and no one can question whether it is real or not, so long as it is real and meaningful for them.

Sadly, what it means to be truly spiritual means different things for people in the church. For some it means attending a particular church or having a certain format for worship.

For others it's all about the right music and right instruments setting the right moods. For others it's about the right sacraments, or seating arrangement. Still others it is about having pews rather than individual seats.

For others it's about having the right bible version or even the right odours. Still others have a spiritual experience when they have been miraculously healed or delivered through some power encounter with the Holy Spirit.

So it is an important question. "What does it mean to be truly spiritual according to Scripture?" For Paul, writing to the Galatian churches, Christian spirituality is based on a relationship with a personal God who has spoken an eternal word.

True spirituality finds its basis in a true and living relationship with Jesus as your Saviour, brought about when the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our need for Christ and begins his work of sanctification in us.

Only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit of the Spirit within us. What's more, the Holy Spirit does not produce this fruit for our private enjoyment. The life of the Spirit flourishes for the sake of others. Spiritual life is meant to be shared.

In our text, Paul teaches three things. First, being spiritual means, restoring one another from sin. "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" (v1).

The fact that we are brothers and sisters in Christ does not keep us out of sin. Previously Paul has spoken about the war of the flesh against the things of the Spirit.

Sometimes, the sinful nature causes us to be out of step with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, because of our own sinful weakness, we get caught in sin. Paul isn't speaking about deliberate, habitual sin, but something that is unexpected.

Sometimes the roaring lion has already pounced, and before we realize it, we have sinned. Even though we have embraced Jesus Christ as our Saviour we still sin.

When we or fellow Christians fall into this kind of sin, they need proper spiritual care. Paul says, they need to be restored. The verb used means to be healed. Just as a broken limb needs to be set and restored so that healing can take place, so do we on occasions.

Sadly, we Christians aren't always that good at it. Sometimes we ignore sin, even lacking the courage to confront it in our own lives, let alone the lives of others. Sometimes we just gossip about it and even pride ourselves that we haven't succumb to such sin.

But if sin isn't treated with proper care, it will in all likelihood become a stinking wound. Those of us who are spiritual should not allow a fellow brother or sister to continue in the pain of sin.

Nor should we treat them like outcasts. They need to be restored. They need to again experience the blessing of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus Christ and be restored to the fellowship. The rehabilitation of sinners is a job for spiritual people.

Yes, we are all spiritual people once converted, but the Lord has blessed the church with some people who are more mature in their spiritual walk.

I would put it to you that restoring sinners is a job for Christians who have the fruit of the Spirit in abundant supply. It is a job for people who recognise that but for the grace of God, they are not in the same mire.

It's a job for people who can again point them to the wonderful Saviour and the forgiveness we have with Him.

Christians who sin need to be restored in a spirit of gentleness, which is part of the fruit of the Spirit (23). The spiritual person is not to be like a bull in a china shop, but one who is gentle and careful.

We don't wish to break the sinner with hurtful, harsh words or actions, but to restore the bruised reed by pointing to them to the love of Christ all over again.

In fact, if we cannot be gentle with a sinner, we had better not attempt to restore them at all, for it might drive them further away. Restoring someone is a delicate task.

Matthew 18:15ff actually describes a careful process, moving from a private discussion to a more public one, always with the goal of healing and restoration. It's actually a mark of the Christian church.

Martin Luther instructed a pastor to help a fallen brother in this way, "Run unto him, and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms."

Think of how gentle the Saviour was when restoring the Apostle Peter after he had denied him three times. Seriously congregation, I don't think we have always been that good at restoring people in a spirit of gentleness.

I still have vivid memories of young couples being brought before the church during a public worship service to confess their sin. I still can't see where the Spirit of gentleness is in such treatment.

Restoring a sinner requires both gentleness and humility. Note the warning. "But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted." Perhaps Paul is thinking about spiritual pride here. It is hard not to feel at least a little self-righteous when we are correcting someone else's

sin. The more we learn about someone else's sin and depravity, the easier it is to look down on them. As Paul warned on another occasion: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Oh may we be careful and to examine our own hearts. Spiritually mature people are as prone to fall into sin as anyone else, maybe more so.

There is a second kind of spiritual work, which I think takes more effort. It is the work of bearing someone else's burden. Note v2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

This verse implies that Christians will have burdens, and heavy ones at that. Being caught in sin is one burden, but there are many others burdens that Christians carry, sometimes no fault of their own.

Things such as sorrow, doubt, failure, loneliness, a debilitating illness, the possibility of divorce, depression, even the frailty of age.

And sometimes our burdens are so heavy that they must be shared if they are to be carried at all.

Yes, yes, there is a sense where God carries our burdens for us, not least the infinite burden of our sin and guilt. Thankfully that has been dealt with at Calvary through His dear Son.

And yes, we are called upon to cast our cares before the Lord and he will care for us. God's shoulders are broad enough to carry all our burdens. However, there are times when God lightens our load by getting other Christians to do some of the lifting.

Yet, sometimes as Christians we are our own worst enemies for we keep trying to carry our burdens all by ourselves. But sometimes they are too heavy for that! We need help.

The blessing of the fellowship of saints is that we can help each other, yes, even being read to pick up someone else's baggage until they can manage again.

Many times people in the church suffer heavy losses, losses too heavy to bear alone. When they do, we need to share their burden and what a blessing the fellowship of the saints are at that time. Some time we can carry each others burdens through prayer. Sometimes it might be warm embrace. Sometimes it might be

practical, doing the washing, preparing a meal, polishing the shoes, helping with some finance. Sometimes it is by reading some Scripture and praying together reminding each other of God's faithfulness and care for us, especially in Jesus Christ, even through a vale of tears when required.

Whenever Christians bear one another's burdens, they are fulfilling the law of Christ. I suggest Paul is referring to the law of loving one's neighbour (5:14).

Although our salvation doesn't depend on it, and even though we are no longer under the law, and saved by faith alone, our Christian faith never stands alone, and one way it doesn't stand alone is by loving our neighbour.

Jesus said in John 13:34; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." Or again in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

The law of Christ is the law of loving one another. By caring for one another, we become law-abiding Christians.

A third sign of being spiritual is to recognize that our neighbour is at least as valuable in the sight of God as we are.

People who have a rather high opinion of themselves are generally unwilling to carry anyone else's baggage. They think serving others is beneath their dignity. In the ancient world, it was considered demeaning to help others.

For the Christian, helping someone else may mean we need to have the mind of Christ. When Jesus got on his knees to wash the disciple's feet, not too many were impressed.

Let us never forget, that Christ did not think equality with God something to grasp, but emptied himself, making himself nothing so that he could carry our burden (Phil. 2:6–7).

Verse 3 reminds us that if we think we are something special, we are deceiving ourselves. More than that, we are nothing!

A stewardess once told the heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali to prepare himself for take

off and to put on his seat belt. Muhammad Ali objected, “Superman don’t need no seatbelt!” The stewardess gently replied, “Superman don’t need no aeroplane.”

By the way, before we object to Paul calling people nothing, let us remember we really are nothing, in and of ourselves. Everything we have comes from God. If we are anything at all, it is only because we are created and redeemed in Christ.

The way to avoid thinking that we are something we are not, is to see ourselves the way that God sees us. This is what v4 means when it says, “Each one should test his actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to someone else.”

Instead of comparing ourselves to others, we should test ourselves against God’s standard, which is really the only one that counts.

This kind of testing as the Puritans called it, is a necessary part of the spiritual life. Paul when writing to the Romans, says in 12:3, “I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Knowing how we measure up to God's standard will help us to bear one another's burdens. When our actions meet God's test as they do whenever they truly are done according to his Word, in service to Christ, for the advancement of his glory, then we can properly take pleasure in his praise.

Paul then adds a rather curious comment in v5, "For each one should carry his own load." At first this seems like a contradiction. Verse 2 told us to bear one another's burdens, here we are told to carry our own load.

Some commentaries make a lot of the different words used in the Greek, but I don't think it has much to do with that at all.

When v5 says that everyone must carry his own load, it is referring to a weight that every person must carry, namely the weight of our own personal responsibility before God.

Notice that v5 begins with the word 'for' hence the connection to v4. We don't have to boast about how well we do. Paul merely says that even though we are to help one another as believers and bear each other's

burdens, we are responsible for our own behaviour. Do not ever try to lighten the load of your own sin by comparing yourself to a failing brother or sister. Why? Because you are going to bear your own load in the judgment.

When the final assessment comes, no one will make your load lighter by being worse than you are. You will bear your own load on that day. The plea we hear so often—"But I was as good as Jack!" or "I wasn't any worse than Jane!" will fall on deaf ears at the Judgment.

Congregation, I have served in a number of congregations, I have never come across one where people are not sinful and hence in need of restoration.

Nor have I ever come across a congregation where there are no burdens to carry. Nor have I ever come across a congregation where there isn't the need to remind one another, that we're not any better than any one else.

May I encourage you, for the sake of Jesus Christ and his bride, to restore with gentleness, carry each other's burdens and don't think too highly of yourself. And finally, may we all follow Christ's example. Amen.

Prayer:

Father, forgive us for the pride of our hearts that keeps us from meekly and lovingly admonishing and restoring each other when we sin. Transform the Christian Reformed Church of Geelong into a people whose hate of sin and love for sinners creates a community of purity and peace and joy. Amen.