

## Sowing to the Spirit

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Why does the church inflict so much pain on others? An answer is the same reason all people hurt one another, Sin. What's the saying, hurt people hurt people? *Sinful people sin against people*. Religious and secular hurt alike. The question is *what can we do about the hurt we inflict?* This passage calls the Church to be a community that restores one another, sows to the Spirit, and propagates the good.

### Restoring One Another

One of the things we find refreshing about psychologists like Dr. Phil is that they tell the truth. Not half the truth but the whole truth. They're not afraid to confront wrong thinking or behavior. But Paul says telling the truth isn't restricted to the professionals, to pastors. It's every Christian's duty to address transgressions, **Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness** (1). Someone who is spiritual is simply one who has the Spirit. What's a **transgression**? It means misstep, a departure from what's good, true, and beautiful into what's ugly and false. We all make missteps don't we? And sometimes we don't even know it. We get "caught," the word has an element of surprise to it. Gossip slips out, we silently judge, a flash of anger. We might not be known for being harsh, gossipy, or unkind but we fall into it. My wife was asking me to fix something around the house. I was preoccupied with something I thought was more important, so I snapped I'll take care of it. It wasn't characteristic but it was still a sin. I'm sorry for that demeaning comment; you didn't deserve that. But what would happen if that kind of speech went unchecked? We'd run over others in conversation, alienate spouses and friends, put marriage on thin ice. Our harshness would spill out onto others. Lust that goes unchecked can lead to adultery. Gossip that isn't corrected can tear a community apart. You see, the degree to which we neglect missteps in one another is the degree to which we are complicit in the hurt of the church. It's not an option; it's a command, restore one another. Now the good news is Jesus **was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification** (Rom 4:25). We can be forgiven and be right with God, *but that should lead to less sin not more*. How should we respond when we see someone caught in a sin? The solution isn't to get less involved, to

back away in self-righteous judgment, but to get more involved—to restore one another. The word means to mend or repair, to better someone. How should we do it? Verse 1 says but watch yourselves less we too are tempted. You ever experience this? Someone is pouring out their heart about a personal struggle, and then in response another person just talk right past them, dropping knowledge without regard, no questions. I saw this recently, and as I watched it, in slow mo, I heard a voice say Be careful, you could easily do the same. The humble person keeps an eye on themselves. They take note. We're also to restore in a **spirit of gentleness**. Zadie Smith, a brilliant novelist with keen insight into relationships says we need to accept that *other people are as real as we are*. It can be tempting to reduce others to a caricature, "They're such, a gossip, a drunk, a spiritual slacker." But restoring gently means not looking at people exclusively through their transgression. Zadie comments, I think the hardest thing for anyone is accepting that others are absolutely as real as you are and have all the same expectations and demands. And it's so difficult that basically the only person that ever did it was Christ. The rest of us are very, very far behind. If we see one another as real people, as real as we are, we will restore one another *gently*. Zadie's right. Jesus did it perfectly, but that's no excuse to not do it imperfectly. When I pulled my friend aside to point out his disregard, I'm sure I could have said it better, but it was more important to obey the Spirit and restore him as best as I could. While it's true we're far behind Christ, it's also true we're called to close the distance on Christ. It's our responsibility to be a people-mending community.

### **Sow to the Spirit**

The church can prevent hurt by restoring one another but also by doing *good*. This passage is obsessed with goodness: don't grow weary in doing good (9); share good things with teachers (6); do good to all (10). What is **good**? Goodness appears in the fruit of the Spirit—kindness, *goodness*—but you could also say goodness is *all the fruit*: love, joy, peace, patience, virtues universally recognized as good. Why? They originate outside us. A secular approach tries to define goodness beginning with us. What's good? Anything *as long as it doesn't hurt anybody*. That works fine with murder but what about something like pornography? One person says watching pornography is harmless. Another says it exploits women and children. Who determines the harm? But when goodness is located outside us

it's fixed, enduring. Goodness is the fruit grown by the Spirit of Jesus (Phil 1:19). *Jesus* puts goodness in the flesh. Just look at him. Accepting others as real as he is. Close to the sick, the downcast, always obedient to his Father, delivered up for our transgressions. Guess what? The Spirit puts *that* goodness in us. How? When we **sow** to the Spirit, **For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life** (7-8). You reap what you sow. It's a life principle. Don't put much into it, you won't get much out of it. Maybe you're getting by sowing little to your city or your church, but don't be deceived, Paul says; *God* is not mocked. We can't get one by him. All will be held to account for how they sowed. If you were held account today, what would you have to show? How do we sow to the Spirit? Two suggestions. First, **sow intentionally**. True goodness requires intention. Do you have a plan for goodness or are you expecting it to spring up on its own? You have to move your elbows, sow your seed; wake up and *decide* to sow to the Spirit or you will default to the flesh. Spirit-filled living isn't automatic; it is chosen. My grandmother used to say, "You always have a choice." What virtue do you need to cultivate? What fruit of the Spirit do you lack? Choose one. Pursue it with a friend, a fight club partner. Check in with one another, restore one another, push one another to *sow* to the Spirit. Repeat. Don't grow weary; be zealous for good! Second, **sow prayerfully**. If goodness belongs to the Spirit, fruit OF the Spirit, we'd be foolish not to ask him for it! For years I've prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, personalizing along the way. When I got to "lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil," I would ask God to deliver me from areas of temptation: lust, pride, impatience. But then one day the Spirit prompted me to start praying, not just for deliverance but for *fruitfulness*. So now I pray: lead me not into lust but into purity of heart, deliver me from being an impatient father into a merciful, tender, father. I ask the Spirit, the Father, and the Son for *goodness*. Sow intentionally and prayerfully, then follow his lead. A friend of mine had a thought pop in his head to check in on a neighbor. Turned out she was in ICU. So he visited her, read Psalms to her, and prayed for her. Then he followed up. The neighbor's health improved, her spirits lifted. Why? Because he sowed to the Spirit; prayerfully and intentionally. He listened and made a choice. When that name pops up, it's not the noble inner you; it's the Spirit you.

## **Propagating the Good**

Now why should we do this: restore one another, sow to the Spirit, propagating the good? Think of the opposite. Sowing to the flesh and reaps corruption. Corruption starts in this life and continues into the next. Have you ever seen a sin slowly disfigure someone? Anxiety, distrust, anger, despair, unbelief, pills, addiction? Corruption is immediate and ultimate. If we sow the flesh, one day we will reap ultimate corruption. But so to the Spirit and reap eternal life. We often think of eternal life and the by and by. If I believe in Jesus, one day I'll escape all this. But eternal life is richer and more immediate, [And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent \(Jn 17:3\)](#). Eternal life is knowing and enjoying the only true God—Father, Spirit, and especially the Son—goodness in the flesh, God in the flesh. It's walking through this life with Jesus, knowing he accepts *the real you*. It's getting so close to his sublime goodness it rubs off on us. An old pastor says, [“Nothing under the sun or above it, on this earth or beneath it, is as meaningful or consequential as this—Jesus Christ, God’s Son and our Lord and Savior. Bottom line. End of story.”](#) Eternal life is immediate *and* ultimate. Living forever with Jesus without the flaws, limitations, and transgressions that plague us in this life. It is living with Jesus in a new world, with a renewed Self, all caught up to the glory of Christ. Eternal life is heaven mending earth, and all who hope in the Son. People who sow the Spirit reap eternal life, and when they do, everyone benefits. When the church restores one another, sows to the Spirit, and reaps eternal life hurt goes down and goodness goes up. We do good to all. Just like the friend who loved his neighbor, the person who restores others, who sows to the Spirit. Let's treat others as real, spread otherworldly goodness, by restoring one another, sowing to the Spirit, and propagating the good.