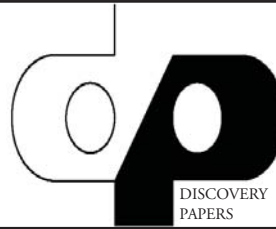


SITTING ON THE COUCH WITH YOUR BROTHER

*SERIES: FROM BUMPER CARS TO CARNIVAL
SWINGS*



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When I was a kid, my family had a simple way of dealing with disputes between kids. If we were fighting with each other, one of the classic solutions my parents instituted was to have us sit on the couch with each other until things were okay. The couch we had to sit on wasn't in the main family room where we typically played; it was in the more formal living room. We just had to sit there, together, until we could say that we weren't mad at each other anymore and we could go on with whatever we were doing.

Today we're finishing up our series looking through the book of Galatians. Last week we started looking into the last two chapters and saw that this is really what the book has been moving toward the whole time. The reason Paul doesn't want the Gentiles in Galatia to submit to circumcision is that it will prevent the people in that community from loving each other. The whole goal of the gospel is to bring people into a loving relationship with God and free them up to love each other. The gospel creates a family. And that family lives out the kingdom of God on earth. The church is a window on earth into the spiritual reality of God's kingdom.

Like any good gift from God, families are the source of some of the deepest joy possible in this life. And like any good gift from God, families can be the source of some of the most intense pain possible in this life. So if we are to live as a family, we have to learn how to walk through those dynamics together. High highs and low lows. Misunderstandings. Flared tempers. Hurt feelings. Joys. Celebrations. So as we do this family thing, we sit on the couch with our brother, in the midst of what can sometimes be messy. All of us here have been adopted into God's family together. We are brothers and sisters in the family. And as we learn to live as a family, we sit together on the couch.

Do good to your brother

This morning we're going to look at the last chapter of Galatians: Galatians 6. This chapter is often thought of as a collection of miscellaneous wisdom. But it is all linked by this idea of how we live out the gospel freedom that makes us a family. We're going to walk through this chapter and look at several specific situations. The link between all of them is doing good. Do good to your brother. Sit on the couch and do good.

Unfortunately, the word "good" has lost most of its meaning in the English language because it is so commonplace. It's like "vanilla." Whose favorite flavor of ice cream is vanilla? Most of us think of vanilla as blank: a non-flavor. But vanilla is a flavor and some people love it by itself. That's the way "good" is. Paul uses two essentially

synonymous Greek words in this passage: "kalon" and "agathon." And these words don't mean "vanilla." They are powerful words. They mean "good." Not good as in "how are you doing?" "Oh, good." Good like Frodo Baggins is good and Sauron is bad. Good like God created the earth and called it "good." Not okay or average or mediocre but "good." Good means "good."

Paul summarizes this instruction in verse 10 which reads in the NIV, "let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Notice here that last phrase, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Sometimes we talk a lot about loving the world and have the attitude that loving each other isn't as important because we're already in. But Paul tells the Galatians to *especially* do good within this family. Do good to your brother.

Do good to your brother when he does bad

The first specific issue that comes up is how do you do good when your brother is doing bad? How do you respond when you find out that your brother or sister is cheating in his marriage, or stealing money from her company, or looking at pornography, or hating his in-laws, or ignoring the needs of the world? Listen to verse 1 in Galatians 6:

What happens if one of you finds out that another one is engaged in some sinful activity? Well, one of the brothers and sisters who is walking in relationship with God's Spirit should try to persuade this one gently to reform his ways. But he should also be careful not to be led astray himself since sin can be so appealing.

What do you do when your brother is doing bad? Do good. Do good to your brother when he does bad. What does that look like? You talk to them about it. But there are a few qualifications because Paul understands what happens when people are playing the game.

Let's say that we're doing this church thing, but instead of living like carnival swings, we are living like bumper cars. Let's suppose for a second, even though I'm sure it is the farthest thing from the truth, that all of us here in this room are playing the game. And let's say that I find out that one of you is cheating on your spouse. Now, if I have any skill at all in the game, I'll recognize that this is a great opportunity for me. This gives me a perfect chance to pass you up. Your sin is an opportunity for my superiority. So maybe I talk to you about how it's not right that you're cheating on your spouse. But beneath my words,

if I'm playing the game, is an element of condescension, of superiority.

Rachel and I are big fans of the TV show *The Office*. On a recent episode, the office had an ethics discussion which included talking about stealing time from the company. The "teacher's pet" character, Dwight, claimed that he had never stolen any time from the company. In response, Jim, another main character, started timing personal activities that Dwight engaged in. Dwight's yawn cost the company four seconds, and scolding Jim for keeping such close track of him cost over fifteen seconds. This is a great example of what Paul is not talking about here. Jim was timing Dwight not in order to do good to him but in order to play the game better. Jim wanted to show Dwight that Dwight wasn't as good as he thought he was.

Now that is an extreme example, but sometimes we treat each other this way. We jump on people when they are struggling with something. Sometimes this is because we are playing the game. But we don't have to play the game in this room. We don't have to live like bumper cars. We are a community centered under God. He gives us our identity; we don't have to compare ourselves all the time. So Paul's qualifications here help people to treat each other in a way that is consistent with the gospel. First, only someone who isn't playing the game should approach a brother who is in sin. Second, that person should do it gently, recognizing the complexity behind the situation and the emotion involved in it. Third, the rebuker needs to remember that he is just as susceptible to sin as the one being rebuked.

These precautions have the effect of equalizing us under God as our Father. They offer us an "out" from the game. If I remember, as I approach you, that I'm just as likely to be tempted to sin as you are, then any sense of superiority is gone. I approach you as a brother, not a traffic-cop. Sitting on the couch with your brother reminds you that we're all the same. We're all working through this complicated process of following Christ together.

I'm afraid that Christians have done a lot of damage in the world and to each other by responding to sin in ways that gets us ahead in the game. Notice that Paul's instructions are for how we respond to each other within the family, not in the world. In fact, most if not all of the instructions in the New Testament for dealing with sin in other people's lives have to do with people within the community of faith. Our role in the world is not to correct their behavior but to invite them into the family. That's the place to start.

I'm also struck by the calmness in Paul's instruction here. Sometimes as Christians, we can panic when we find out that someone is doing something that we think they shouldn't do. And sin is a big deal, but panic doesn't seem to be the right response. Panicking over someone's sin doesn't love them. If your panicking, your goal is to stop the person in sin from sinning as soon as possible, not to walk alongside of her and care for her.

Several years ago when I was single, I was involved in a

ministry. At one point, I started to suspect that one of the other members might be sexually active in a dating relationship. And I flipped out. I panicked. Because sexual activity before marriage is wrong. And I told myself that I was really concerned for that person. But I realize in hindsight that I was mostly mad because I wanted to do the same thing. I wasn't engaged in that kind of sin, but I wanted to be. So I just felt like it was unfair that this person was getting away with it.

But that's the wrong way to respond to sin. Nobody "gets away" with sin. Sin has its own consequences. And we're all in this together in our efforts to follow God authentically. When someone is engaged in sinful activity, our role is not to catch him. It's not to humiliate him. It's not to use the opportunity to feel superior to them. That situation is a chance to love him and come alongside of him in life. To sit on the couch with him. Do good to your brother when he does bad.

Do good to your brother when needs arise

The next issue that Paul addresses has to do with needs. In any family, there are needs. Financial needs, emotional needs, physical needs, social needs, etc. And needs cause some tough questions. How do you balance whose needs get taken care of and in what order and by whom? How do you make sure that one person isn't just abusing the system? How do you respond with compassion to those that really need help?

Paul has an interesting combination of two phrases in verses 2 through 6. In verse 2, Paul encourages his readers to "carry each other's burdens," and then in verse 5, he tells them "each one should carry his own load." So we have what sounds like two opposite commands, but I think Paul is dealing with the complicated situation of how personal needs are handled in a mixed community. And he seems to combine elements of personal responsibility with elements of caring for each other. Listen to my translation of verses 2 through 5.

You need to take care of each other's needs. This is how you follow the law that Christ lived by. But if someone thinks that he is really more important than someone else (which of course he isn't), then he's just lying to himself. So everyone should examine himself apart from comparing himself to another. That way he knows that he is acting rightly as best as he is able and not trying to be better than anyone else. In that way each person will be responsible for himself.

What do we do when we are in need? Do good. What do we do when our brother is in need? Do good. Do good to your brother when needs arise.

No matter whose needs they are.

Let me unpack this by sharing a brief parable. A father had two sons. The oldest son was a successful lawyer who lived in Boston. The youngest son was an amateur musician trying to make his mark in San Diego. And in this particular family, it seemed like the youngest son was always asking for help from his older brother. It was always just a few hundred more dollars and he would hit his big break. The older brother started to wonder whether the requests for money would ever stop. But one day the younger brother got a phone call. His older brother had died the night before. As the story unfolded, he learned that his brother had been suffering with cancer for years, but had never told him. In fact, he had gone through numerous painful treatments. But he had never shared any of this with his brother. The first his brother heard of it was in the news of his death.

Two brothers. One of them is always asking for money. He abrogates his personal responsibility onto his family. But the older brother is on the other end of the extreme. He suffers through years of a terminal illness and never shares his needs. He seems to think that his family has no role in caring for him or meeting his needs. I think it's clear that the healthy attitude is somewhere in between. You aren't living like a brother if you expect all your needs to be met. But you also aren't living like a brother if you never share your needs. And in this section of Galatians, Paul wades right into this complexity.

The truth is that this passage will speak to each of us in different ways depending on which of these brothers we relate to. Some of us need to share our needs and let the community respond to them. We need to let the members of our family carry our burdens. Others of us need to stop demanding that the community meet all of our needs. We need to learn to be responsible for ourselves.

Still others may need to respond differently in different relational contexts. This is true for me. I have the tendency to keep my needs to myself in the community at large because I am most comfortable in the role of caregiver. But that can only last so long, so often I come home and end up dumping all my needs on my wife. What I'm learning is to balance things out a little more. With some people, I need to learn to allow them to carry my burdens. With my wife I need to learn to be responsible for myself more often.

So my encouragement is to do good to your brother when needs arise. And the trick here is to avoid the extremes: keeping my needs to myself on one hand or demanding that others meet my needs on the other hand. So what's in the middle? Well, I think a healthy family operates something like this: Needs are shared openly and then people are given the freedom to respond to them as they see fit. I don't keep my needs to myself, I share them. But I don't demand that others meet them in the way I think they must be met. I give people freedom to respond as they see fit. Let your needs be known and give people freedom to respond as they are led.

Incidentally, this principle is what governs how we think about finances at PBC. We have a rough budget by which we operate as a church. Our practice is to share the current state of that budget with the family at large. We're about to do just that later on in this service. And we fully expect that the members of the body will decide prayerfully for themselves, what, if any, response the budget data might lead them to. As best I can tell, this is how a family operates. We don't present our budget and demand that you respond by giving enough money to meet our projected expenses. But we also don't want to shy away from the complicated topic of finances and never talk about our needs. We share our needs and let God lead us as a family in deciding the appropriate response.

Do good to your brother with your money

This brings us to the third very practical area that Paul addresses. We've talked about doing good in the midst of sin and doing good in the midst of needs; now we want to learn to do good with our money. It only makes sense that this would come up. All throughout this section, the issue of finances has been lurking below the surface. In the last section, Paul hinted at the issue of financial needs. In this section, Paul addresses money much more directly. Listen to verses 6 through 8.

Those people among you who are charged with teaching the Bible to each other should be financially supported by the family. Don't fool yourselves! No one can get away with ignoring God. When someone plants a certain type of seed, that's the type of plant that he will harvest. In the same way, if someone acts only in accordance with his natural desires, that mindset will grow throughout the community and poison it. But if someone acts in accordance with his relationship with God, that mindset will grow throughout the community and everyone will taste more of the life that comes from knowing God.

The final issue Paul addresses is how we as a family are to use the money that we have. Do good to your brother with your money. He starts by encouraging people to support their local community of faith. Paul explains that people within the family should financially support those members who care for the family by teaching Scripture. In simple terms, Paul is saying that it is right for a church to hire pastors. The fact that my salary is paid by the combined generosity of this congregation means that we are acting like a family. It's not something I have to be ashamed of, as though I'm getting away with something. It's not something that you have to feel manipulated into or pressured to participate in. Paul is describing that this is the reasonable way for a community brought together by Christ to function.

But Paul doesn't stop with that. He wants to give people a bigger picture of how money works in a family. So he uses the imagery of sowing and reaping. His basic point is that you get what you pay for. Garbage in, garbage out. So if you handle your money only according to natural

principles, that's all you can expect to get out of it. You might stay secure, you might get what you want, but that's about it. And that's too bad.

But what can happen in the church is a remarkable thing. In this place is the opportunity for everyday earthly things to be invested in another reality. In this place, the mundane gets transformed into the mysterious. In the kingdom of God on earth, physical things have spiritual effects. So something as simple as a little money gets changed into the opportunity for someone in high school to encounter God for the first time. Money gets transformed into the opportunity for two people struggling with their marriage to see God at work in the midst of their relational dynamics. Money gets transformed into an opportunity for a community to come together in worship of the almighty God.

You see, what we tend to do is to separate out various aspects of our lives. As we've been studying Galatians, I've argued that we can't separate our spiritual and our social lives. The gospel results in a community. But we're also tempted to separate our spiritual and financial lives. I'll love God. I'll even love other people. But what does money have to do with loving? Loving is a holistic activity. We love with all of us, including our money.

No divide should exist between our spiritual lives and our economic lives. Now is a really uncertain time in our country economically. But what we believe about God is that he is unchanging. He is not uncertain. In fact, God is the most certain thing that exists. That's what we've been seeing in Galatians. God is more certain than what people think of you. God is more certain than whether you feel included or excluded in any particular group. And God is more certain than how you're doing economically. Our privilege as followers of God is to act on His certainty rather than to be shaken by the world's uncertainty.

Our culture tells a story about finances. It goes like this: As you get older and more established, you'll have more and more money. You'll be able to spend more and more and support the economy. You progress in life as you earn more, spend more, and consume more. But the gospel story is very different. It's a story of having less and less. It's a story of being more and more consumed with spiritual realities and recognizing how mundane, earthly things make an impact in the kingdom of God. I'm compelled when I hear stories of people who think of their finances this way. They see their growth in life as spending less and less, giving more and more, learning to get by with less. And I want that for myself. To be honest, sometimes I'm not entirely sure how to get there, but I want to move in that direction.

One practical suggestion I can offer that we have found helpful is to set up a separate bank account that you can use for giving. Having a separate account that you put money into every month and then use for needs when they arise provides great freedom. You have already set aside the money for some needs other than your own. So when the need comes up, you can support it freely. My wife and I started doing this in seminary, and it has given

us the chance to excitedly support various needs that come up because we already have money set aside to respond to needs. And we've been moving slowly, but we'd like to see ourselves gradually increase how much we put into that account each year.

This passage encourages us to do good to our brother with our finances. Don't be fooled by thinking that money has nothing to do with spirituality. Do good to your brother with your money.

Do good persistently

We've been talking a lot about doing good, and I have just one more point to mention. Doing good can get tiresome. It's a lot easier to react to people, it's a lot easier to be self-focused. This doing good stuff gets old, sometimes pretty quickly. Listen to how Paul acknowledges this in verse 9 and 10.

So don't get tired of doing good because it will have a positive effect in the lives of others and the health of the community in due time if you're persistent. Whenever you can, try to intentionally love someone else, especially your brothers and sisters in the family of faith.

So our last exhortation is to do good persistently. This is simply reality: loving others gets old. In the last chapter, Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit. He uses the same kind of imagery here in chapter 6 as he talks about reaping a harvest. The truth is that loving others is a kind of relational investment that we make. Some investments take a long time to mature. Some investments take longer than this lifetime to mature. Sometimes investments do the opposite of maturing – we've seen enough of that lately. But what God promises is that investment in love will never lose value. He says that we will reap the benefits of loving each other. And sometimes we need to hear this. We need to be assured that our efforts are not in vain. So be assured: your efforts at love will bear fruit. God will use them. Do good persistently.

What Paul concludes with in the last half of chapter 6 is a reminder of how this is all possible. He's gotten really practical and given us a number of suggestions on how to relate to each other. Taken apart from the rest of Galatians, this could read like a list of helpful advice on getting along with each other. But we don't take it apart from the rest of Galatians. The way he is describing relationships in this family is all founded upon what he has been talking about in the whole book. So these last verses really summarize that.

This whole family thing is summarized well by Paul in verse 15. The NIV reads, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation." We generally understand the term new creation as referring to something that happens to us individually. We, as individuals, have died with Christ, and God has created something new within us. And "new creation" is definitely used in Scripture in those terms. But it's likely that Paul uses the term here to refer to the community,

not the individual. Circumcision and Uncircumcision are camps of people. They are two crowds. And they are playing the game that the world plays. They identify themselves by how they compare to each other. They are, in effect, riding the bumper cars against each other.

But this new creation is a new family. It is a group of people that is riding the carnival swings together. This thing called church stands outside of those two groups of circumcision and uncircumcision. And this thing called church stands outside of all the regular groups we usually operate within. This is a new thing. A new creation. People called together by the gospel so that they might be free to love each other. And Paul says, "Don't go back to thinking of yourself as a member of one of those new groups. Think of yourself as part of the new creation. That's who you are. That's where you belong."

This new creation is a family. In this family, God is our Father. He is the head. The family is defined by his fatherhood. And we have been invited into this family by Christ, the Father's son who invites us into the family and calls us his brother. What we're learning to do is sit on the couch with our brother. And what we find out is that this couch is big enough for three. Because what made our adoption into God's family possible was Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. And when we trust Him, He becomes our brother. So I sit on the couch with Christ on one side of me and each of you on the other.

This is living out the gospel. Learning to love each other. Paul says if we get this wrong, if we go back to playing the game, we'll have forfeited the entire gospel. This new creation, this church, this living in community, is serious business. This is where the gospel becomes real.

My encouragement to us is to see the way we relate to each other as moving from living like bumper cars to living like carnival swings with each other. Enjoy the freedom that God has given you. Use that freedom to love each other. And sit on the couch together, with Christ, as a family. Paul wraps up the whole book in the last 8 verses. So to close out this series, I'll let Paul's words be my last words. Here's Galatians 6:11-18.

Now I'll take the pen from my scribe and write a few last words of my own, but you'll have to excuse my terrible handwriting. Whoever it is among you who wants to show how good he is at getting people to follow him by convincing you to be circumcised is only trying to avoid the persecution that comes from preaching about the cross of Christ. The ironic thing is that those people who are trying to get you to be circumcised don't even keep the law themselves. They just want you to be circumcised so they can brag about how many

followers they have. But someone shoot me if I ever brag in any of my own accomplishments instead of bragging about what our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. It was at that cross that I stopped thinking the world's ideas were important and they stopped thinking I was important. So it doesn't matter whether you are circumcised or whether you are uncircumcised. The only thing that matters is the new community that Christ has created out of us. So to whoever decides not to be circumcised, may you experience peace and mercy. And the same for those Jews among you who are already circumcised. To the rest of you, please stop trying to cause me trouble. Don't you realize that my own body shows how much I have suffered on behalf of Jesus? May the grace that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ be the most real thing to you at all times, my brothers and sisters. May God make it so.

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