

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16

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. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load. ⁶ Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Our faith is at the same time personal and public

1. God calls us and keeps us personally
2. God gives us a faith that is to be expressed and encouraged publicly.

You might have heard people say that their faith “is a very personal thing”. You have also heard that faith is a public matter, after all that’s why we come together, that’s why we join together on Sundays in public worship. So which one is it? Is faith a personal thing or is it public matter? Well, it is very much both, isn’t it? In a way, it is really two sides of the same coin. Faith is both public and private. These two aspects of our faith are very closely related although they seem so very different. The public and private aspects of our faith are both there, are both called for, are both encouraged by God for us to see as beneficial for us and according to his will. And so it is like a coin that is skillfully rolled over the knuckles, or flipped frequently, the private and public aspects of our faith alternate frequently as both sides are seen and played out in a number of different ways in our everyday lives.

The words of our lesson for today walk us through this constant alternating of public and personal faith. Through God’s gracious gift of faith, we are united to Christ and we have a bond which each other. Through God’s gracious gift of faith, we are blessed with a relationship with God that is both deeply personal and importantly public. You could say it is two sides of the same coin.

Well, let’s take a look at each side of the coin. Faith is a deeply personal thing. I suppose this would be the more private side of the coin and so for the sake of the visual aid let’s call that the tail side. God connects you to Christ, through him you have a personal relationship with Jesus. He clothes you with his righteousness so personally in baptism. The sign of the cross is traced on you. His name is given to you. Water is poured on your head. It is personal. A bond between you and Christ Jesus is created, and in order to nurture and to strengthen that bond God feeds you with the holy nourishment of Word and Sacrament. You listen to God’s Word, you read it, no one can

understand and listen to it for you. It is your own personal time of strengthening and reflection as you read your Bible, or take in your morning devotion, or spend time in a personal talk with God in the quiet or even not so quiet moments of the day. And once again, even in the togetherness of the worship service, there are personal moments of understanding, God's Word falls onto each of your ears and takes root in each individual heart. It changes and renews and effects each individual mind. You come up to the altar to the Lord's table together. There you stand and then kneel next to each other, but the body and blood of Christ is pressed against your flesh in a personal way. Forgiveness is yours and pledged to you on such an individual level. Assured of forgiveness you are then called to carry out your faith in your life and all the different challenges and opportunities that you yourself have to face. Paul encourages that personal life lived for Christ when he encourages the Galatians to watch themselves, to watch out for the temptations of pride and arrogance that arise from within. He urges them to test their own actions. He holds them each personally responsible as he calls them to carry their own load. Faith is personal in the way God comes to us. He comes to you. He saves you. He loves each of you. Jesus has lived and died for you, but faith is also personal in the way that we are called to carry out and live that faith. Jesus lived a perfect life in your place, but no one can live the life that God has now given you in your place. God saves you, redeems, and sanctifies and now as one set apart for him, as one who has died to sin and become a new creation, as one included in his kingdom, and made of member of his family he expects each of you to live as his dear child. God expects you to live out your faith, and each of us is held accountable and responsible. He calls us to carry our own load. Yes, faith is personal.

With that said, our faith is also public. Perhaps in our coin analogy that we are using today, we would call this the heads side of the coin. This is the side of your faith that more people recognize. Faith is a deeply personal thing, but God tells us that our faith is public matter as well. A personal relationship with God also includes a certain relationship with the world around us and a certain relationship with our fellow believers. Jesus tells you that you are the light of the world. You are a city on a hill that is placed where others may see you, and you are placed in this position for the benefit of others. You are to let your light shine as the light of Christ in this sin darkened world. And yet our faith is not only public in the sense that we are exposed to the world, but our faith is interpersonal, and it is relational. It is public in the sense that you don't go into that big dark and scary world alone. God gives you back- up, support, a family of believers that provides aid and strength, encouragement, and when necessary, rebuke and correction. God sends us out into this world and he gives us to each other. He gives us his Spirit personally, but then he encourages us to all walk in step with the Spirit and to do this together. (Galatians 5). He unites us to the body of Christ and calls us to carry out the ministry of the Church collectively as well as individually. He encourages us to find and seek out and join and connect with and care for other people, especially fellow believers. Whether you are an outgoing and social person or whether you identify yourself as more of an introvert and a private person; whatever the case may be, he has created for us a family of believers, his church on earth so that we might have a regular and relational and public expression of our faith. Our faith is personal and it is public.

This past week 2,500+ young men and women along with their youth leaders gathered on the campus of Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. At the rally we celebrated the bond that God has given us. It was very public event, but still a very personal affair. In the midst of that sea of people, individual hearts were touched by the word of God spoken in the daily devotions, by the keynote addresses and the many different workshops that were offered which sought to apply

God's Word to our lives. Our faith is personal and it is public. God's Word is sent out to the masses of God's church on earth so that it may touch our individual hearts as it shapes the decisions that each of us makes in our own lives and molds the lives that we live for God. God's Word touches and renews our minds so that each one of us may live out of thankful obedience to our God who reigns and who has saved us by his grace in Christ Jesus.

But there is this tendency among sinful human beings, there is this habit within our own sinful nature, to try to make our faith either one of the other instead of both/and. For various reasons a sinner like you and me might fall into the temptation to make our faith so private that we fail to connect with our fellow Christians that God has united us with. We resist encouragement from fellow believers. We drift away from the body of believers and we gladly go into a little shell. When someone we know sins we say that is his or her business and we don't reach out to correct or help that person, because we may selfishly wish for the same type of "leave me alone" treatment. We refrain from worship or service or fellowship with a Christian congregation sometimes even using the excuse that we would be just fine and somehow better off if I just read my Bible on my own away from the distractions of public worship. We hide under the false pretense that our faith is something far too private, too personal and we miss out on blessings that God has in store for us. This is not what God intended for our faith and yet this is a common tendency that our foe the devil can and does exploit for his purposes. Our faith, your faith in Jesus, ought to be public as well as personal.

However, there are also occasions and times in our lives that we make our faith only to be a public thing. At times like this we may seem very connected to our congregation, we may be involved in worship, maybe you are even heavily involved service to the church, but there are plenty of times when we are in essence just going through the motions. Little or no effort goes into our private faith. We let the personal devotions go to the wayside. We lack focus in public worship. We are there publicly, but our private connection is weak or it is suffering.

Our faith is public and it is private and that is by God's wise design. Our faith should not be a coin that is sitting there static, it is designed to flip, to alternate, to show both sides. Notice how the apostle Paul goes back and forth between these two truths. And as he speaks a thoughtful balance is struck. He speaks of how our faith spins and flips from public to private as he describes how God wants our faith to look like and to function. Paul writes, ***Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*** (public) ***But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*** (personal) ² ***Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*** (public and relationship based) He addresses the sin of personal pride and calls us to hold ourselves personally accountable in how we live and carry out our faith without comparing ourselves to each other. (personal). And then in the next breath he encourages believers to pitch in and support the work of the public ministry. ⁶ ***Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.*** Like a coin being rolled over the knuckles, Paul goes back and forth between faith's personal and public applications.

As those who have been called by Christ we celebrate the bond that we have in Christ and God urges us to also celebrate and enjoy that bond that God makes as he brings us into the body of Christ. He encourages us to find a place within the body of believers, within a local congregation, and to support the work of the church with our gifts and our offerings. God loves the cheerful giver, and does not our support of the public ministry come from a personal connection that is so often blessed by public instruction? We hear God's Word together our hearts are filled and out of that overflow we give our gifts to God.

Our faith is public and it is deeply personal, but most importantly our faith, whether public or private, is all about Christ. Paul holds out this most important of points as he writes. ¹⁴ ***May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*** It is all about Jesus. It is not just about something that we personally feel nor is our faith merely about some empty rituals or a mere public expression of faith, but God in his goodness transforms us inside and out, personally and publicly, into a new creation. It is all about Jesus and what he has done and continues to do for us. The Spirit of God speaks through the Apostle Paul ¹⁵ ***Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*** ¹⁶ ***Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule.*** In this section we have talked a lot about our faith and your faith. And yet we praise God that our faith, your faith, my faith is not really just about you or me. But our faith, your individual faith is based on Christ. The one who paid for the sins of the whole world is also your personal Savior. By the gift of his Spirit, through his gracious gift of faith, each one of us gladly calls him our God. Each of us can gladly call him my Redeemer, my Savior, my LORD and through this faith God pours out his mercy and forgiveness on us and he will give us peace.

It is from that personal relationship with God that our relationship with others, our lives of holy living rise and fall. A personal relationship with Jesus, your Savior, and LORD will directly affect the way that you live out our personal lives and how we publicly put Christ on display in our lives. Connected to Christ personal we will live for Christ who ransomed us. We will hear and answer our Lord's call to support the work of his church. We will reach out and help others especially those who belong to the family of believers. Because through a personal relationship with Jesus we know that Christ Jesus has won for us a great reward and he promises to bring us together with all believers to our eternal home in heaven. Out of thanks for all this we faithfully serve him publicly and privately.

As we celebrate our Independence Day, as we live in a nation that is known and celebrated for a spirit of rugged individualism, as we live in a world of "me", a world that seems to be all about self-promotion and advancement, it can be difficult to keep a proper focus on serving God and living for him. But that personal relationship with Christ that he blesses us with, that he comes and gives us through word and sacrament, is what fills us up so that we may gladly serve our God, support his kingdom, and share the love of our LORD. I was reminded of all of this near the very end of our rally as the band Koine sang their version of the very familiar hymn. "Lord you love the cheerful giver." The words of this hymn sum up nicely how our personal faith is nurtured so that it might be expressed beautifully and publicly.

[1] Lord, you love the cheerful giver, Who with open heart and hand, Blesses freely, as a river That refreshes all the land. Grant us, then, the grace of giving With a spirit large and true That our life and all our living We may consecrate to you.

[2] We are yours--your mercy sought us, found us in death's dreadful way, To the fold in safety brought us, never more from you to stray. Your own life was freely given as an offering on the cross for each sinner, now forgiven From eternal shame and loss.

[3] Blessed by you with gifts and graces, may we heed your Spirit's call, gladly in all times and places give to you who gives us all. You have bought us; now no longer can we claim to be our own; ever free and ever stronger we shall serve you, Lord, alone.

We can no longer claim to be our own. We have each been bought and paid for by the blood of Christ, and now we are called to serve our LORD, ever free and ever stronger, we will serve the LORD privately and publicly. Amen.