

True Freedom: True Relationships

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[0 : 0 0] I came across it recently and it comes from a book called Liquid Love with a subtitle on the frailty of human bonds and it's by I think he's a renowned Polish sociologist called Zygmunt Bauman Zygmunt Bauman Liquid Love on the Frailty of Human Bonds and on the cover of this book it says the title Liquid Love and then there's a picture of a heart drawn on a sandy beach and the tide is coming in and so the title along with the picture on the cover are meant to indicate in a sense the nature of relationships today and that most relationships are temporary not many are permanent or fixed or relationships where the commitment is for a long time and so Bauman as a sociologist is commenting on how he sees how people relate to one another in the world today and what he observes is interesting but it's obvious in a sense he observes that the human bonds of family of class religion marriage even love these bonds aren't as reliable as they once were or even as desirable anymore for people and how they relate to one another and so he argues that in our human consumerist age day society he argues that human relationships are caught between this need for on the one hand security and on the other hand freedom we want both security and freedom where we want the benefits of a good relationship like the giving and the receiving of love we want that but at the same time we don't want a relationship that really involves too much commitment and so Bauman coined this phrase liquid love to describe this trend in relationships relationships that are so loosely tied that they can be quickly untied effortlessly whenever it suits and so bonds between people aren't really intended to last anymore or even expected to last and so if new bonds are made if a new relationship is entered into then it must be fluid enough to be able to change when the circumstances change and so I guess we're well aware of this kind of liquid love that we see in our world today we see it in society and what it does it produces relationships that are more like liquid than they are like concrete but when it comes to relationships what do we actually need and what do we actually want do we want them to be more like liquid or do we want them to be more like concrete what is the best way for us to relate to each other as human beings well what we get in this bible reading from Galatians chapter 6 is a picture of what our human relationships ought to look like and so the author of this book Galatians is a man called Paul the apostle and he is writing to Christian believers he's writing to churches and so he's talking about the kinds of relationships that should exist within the church but even if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian then the quality of relationships that he describes here

I think are the relationships that we know that we need and in our heart of hearts we actually really want and they're not the kind of relationships where they're liquid and the ties are loose they're not the kind of transactional relationships that we tend to enter into for what we can get out of it no what's described here are the concrete kind of relationships that we need and so this comes up in this letter because there were problems in how these Galatians the people he's writing to the problems and how these Christians were relating to each other in the church and the problem is there in verse 26 where he says let us not become conceited provoking and envying each other so he's saying that's not how you should relate to each other but then in chapter 6 verse 1 to 10 he shows us how we should relate to each other now what he says here might seem like a bunch of random statements that are disconnected but what they are our statements are points about how we relate because if we take them to heart they'll show us the kind of person that we ought to be that I ought to be and the kind of person that you ought to be if the relationships that we have with other people are ever going to flourish what he's saying here will help us put into practice the kind of life that will enable our relationships to flourish whatever those relationships are so there's some points that come up on the screen this is basically just a rundown of what's here in this passage six things restore one another from sin carry one another's burdens carry your own load share with one another you reap what you sow do good to all restore one another sorry so the first one is restore

one another from sin so he says verse 1 brothers and sisters if someone is caught in a sin you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted so Paul here is calling his readers brothers and sisters so he's got the sense that the church is basically a family and he's reminding the readers that they are part of one big family called the church and it's important because when somebody is caught in a sin which could be any of us then we need to know that the people around us are like our family and they're there to help us and so we should never think that we are immune to falling into sin or never think that we don't need the kind of help that Paul is talking about here so what needs to be done when somebody is caught in a sin well the answer is he says restoration to restore and so the word restore here means to return to its former condition or to mend and so the term is used for putting a fractured bone back into place if you've ever broken your leg playing football or broken your arm you know that to put the bone back together to get it sorted out it's going to be painful it's going to be difficult and generally it's best if somebody else is there to help not just a mate but probably a doctor is a good person to help in that situation and so that's the kind of restoring he's talking about here it's mending it's putting right again and we need help to do that so who should do the help who should give the help who should do the restoring Paul says you who are spiritual and so every Christian has the spirit of God dwelling in their lives so every Christian is spiritual so it's the responsibility of everybody in the church to restore someone caught in sin but having said that some people may be better at helping than others and the restoration needs to be done gently he says and that word gently is from gentleness which is one of the the fruit of the spirit and so restoring someone from sin is something we probably tend to avoid

either because we're quite quick to criticize people so when somebody else fails or falls or does something they shouldn't do we're probably quite judgmental so we tend to avoid trying to restore them because they them looking bad in a sense makes us look good or maybe we're just too afraid to confront someone when what they're doing is wrong and we would rather just avoid it we're not confrontational all the better for a quiet life and churches can be good at criticizing people for their sin looking down on people or judging people and yet what Paul's saying here is that shouldn't be our response it shouldn't be one of judgment condemnation or even gossip and also churches are good at I guess ducking sin all together by just pretending that if we just leave it for long enough it will maybe go away and the whole thing will just magically be restored but he's saying here no it's our responsibility to restore a person and we'll want to see it happen and we'll want to restore them because we love them but he says it's got to be done with an awareness that we also may be tempted in other words we're also capable of falling into temptation we're also capable of getting caught up in a sin whatever it is and so if we're part of God's family we've got to restore our brothers and sisters but also we need to know that we may need restoration ourselves and so that's his first thing the second thing he goes on to is after restoring one another from sin secondly carry one another's burdens so he says carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ so we all have burdens let's just be honest that we may have burdens really to our health to our mental well-being to our family to our work situation to our finances and all of these burdens can cause all kinds of feelings of failure disappointment guilt depression loneliness or whatever so what Paul is saying here is that we should always be ready to help carry someone else's burdens and also willing to let someone help us carry ours because burdens if they're ever going to be carried are going to need to be shared because we'll never help someone without some of their burden falling on us so it's maybe like when your pal buys a new house and you stupidly agree that you'll help him shift his stuff he'll hire a van you'll turn up Saturday morning nine o'clock and you'll help him get his stuff from third floor flat in Partick into another second third fourth floor flat somewhere else in Glasgow and it comes to the point where the massive sofa has to be lifted down the stairs into the van and you've kind of tried to engineer it so you take a couple of boxes of plates or something small hoping that another couple of guys will have to take the sofa and you'll avoid it but it comes to the bit and you actually need to carry the sofa with him because he can't do it on his own and it is far too heavy but by sharing the weight together you can do it you can make it happen and yet the problem is that we are often so reluctant to help share somebody else's burden we don't want to commit to carrying someone's burden why because we don't know how heavy the burden is going to be and we don't know how long we're going to have to help them carry it it could be a long time and so we worry that it's going to be too demanding or too draining on our time and yet what Paul is saying here gives the impression that if you do have a burden then the church should be the best place to be able to help you it shouldn't be the place that you avoid because people are too

busy to help you with your burdens it should be the place that you go to because there are people there who are part of your family they love you and care for you and want to help you okay so our instinctive response should be to help someone when they're burdened and Paul says when we do we fulfill the law of Christ so the law of Christ is simply what Jesus taught so Jesus summed up the commandments by saying love God and love your neighbor and so the law of Christ can be summed up as loving your neighbor and it can be done not by leaving our neighbor with their burden but by stepping in to help and so I just wonder is there somebody who has a burden that we could step in and help right now or are we so burdened that we would be grateful if somebody came and helped us okay that's the second point restore one another's restore one another from sin firstly secondly carry one another's burden third carry your own load he says if anyone thinks they're something when they are not they deceive themselves each one should test their own actions then they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else for each one should carry their own load Paul's saying don't think too highly of yourself so he's saying there needs to be a humility about us that remembers that we are no better than anybody else and we're deceiving ourselves if we think we are and so this relates to what Paul's just said because if we think we're superior to someone we'll never stoop to the level of wanting to serve them if we think we're above them either to restore them from sin or to carry their burdens because we'll think we look pretty good compared to them if they've fallen into sin or if they're struggling with a heavy burden but what we need to do according to Paul is to test our actions in other words we shouldn't compare ourselves to other people which we're probably good at why should we not do this because he's saying ultimately we are responsible to God for what we do so it doesn't really matter what other people think of you and it doesn't even matter what you think of yourself because what matters is what God thinks of me and of you and that's why Paul says each one should carry their own load might sound like a contradiction from carrying each other's burdens to then carry your own load but there's no contradiction the word for burdens in verse 2 means a heavy weight whereas the word for load in verse 5 it's more like a kind of luggage like what you take on a trip suitcase or a rucksack easy for you to carry on your own you don't need any help with it so we're responsible for helping others with their heavy load but we're personally responsible for carrying our load it's ours in other words God has given each one of us a particular set of circumstances in life and that is our load to carry others will have their different loads to carry but we have got ours and so we shouldn't be looking at other people and what they've got to do and thinking that we are better than them because they're making more of a mess of their lives than we are what he's saying here is that God is our judge and so we are responsible to him for how we live and for how we use what we have in our lives okay let's carry your own load fourthly he says share with one another verse 6 nevertheless the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor so the word share here connects this with how we relate to one another in church so it's clear that relationships in church should be relationships of mutual giving and receiving sharing and Paul's talking here about sharing between the instructor and those who receive instruction in other words between the minister and the people and so as the teacher shares with the people so the people share in return so it's meant to be a two-way relationship and so when Paul says they must share all good things well we can assume most basically it means sharing like a word of thank you thank you for what's been learned or sharing how the word of God has impacted my life the difference it's made to me but it will also mean sharing financially not in the sense of paying for a service like you might be an architect or a lawyer but sharing together in ministry a sign of partnership in the gospel of our commitment to God and our commitment to God's people through the church so that's the fourth thing share with one another fifth is you reap what you sow so what does that mean verse seven and eight do not be deceived God cannot be mocked a man reaps what he sows whoever sows to please their flesh from the flesh will reap destruction whoever sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life so Paul's using an agricultural metaphor here to make his point and it's a simple one we get it you reap what you sow if you take your children out to the garden and you plant sunflower seeds then guess what you reap sunflowers eventually after the sun shines and the rain and so on and so on but what he's saying is what is true agriculturally what is true in the world out there in the weather system is also true spiritually and so that's why he says there are two kinds of sowing he says we can sow to our flesh which is our sinful nature or we can sow to the spirit and he's already mentioned this fight this battle this conflict between the spirit versus the flesh earlier in chapter five as if we sow to the flesh he's saying our sinful nature we'll reap destruction but if we sow to the spirit he's saying we reap eternal life well

what does he mean well I think John Stott in his commentary on Galatians illustrates this well listen to what he says he says to sow to the flesh is to pander to it to cosset cuddle and stroke it instead of crucifying it the seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge nurse a grievance entertain an impure fantasy or wallow in self-pity we are sowing to the flesh every time we linger in bad company whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying every time we read pornographic literature every time we take a risk which strains our self-control we are sowing sowing sowing to the flesh some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness okay so sowing and reaping if you take bad things in if you do bad things then you'll reap bad things in return essentially is what Paul's saying so how do we sow to the spirit well again he connects us back to the fruit of the spirit which is mentioned in chapter 5 the fruit of the spirit won't grow in our lives just by us sitting back and doing absolutely nothing so we are responsible for the sowing and we sow well we spoke with Peter and Katie and Taryn we sow by reading God's word both ourselves and to our children by praying by doing good to others by serving others we're sowing we're sowing we're sowing and it says we make these daily choices to live for God and not for ourselves whether it be in our thinking or in our speaking in our behavior that we sow to the spirit and there's an old saying that I think sums up point Paul's point really well which is sow a thought reap an act sow an act reap a habit sow a habit reap a character sow a character reap a destiny it's so true isn't it so

[19 : 41] we will reap what we sow okay and then the sixth one is do good to all verse 9 and 10 he says let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up therefore as we have opportunity let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers so to become weary essentially means to lose heart and it can happen for all kinds of reasons Paul's saying here persevere don't give up don't give in stick at it keep on doing good because we can become weary if we want to live for Jesus and serve Jesus we can become weary when we want to help Jesus's people when I was training as a minister my supervisor said to me he said church would be absolutely brilliant if it weren't for the people and of course he got it wrong but the reality is that all of us are sinful self-centered and selfish we're not what we should be and we know it and so if you're in church maybe for the first time today please don't think that everybody who comes here is sorted the church is not some kind of museum for showing off the saints the church is more like a hospital for sick people we're all sick and we need help and because of that is always going to be a challenge to cultivate the kind of relationships that Paul is talking about here it is always going to be difficult trying to relate to other people and yet it is worth it despite it being hard work and it all comes back to this principle of sowing and reaping because if we continue to sow and sow and sow we will eventually reap a harvest we'll see a harvest and we'll see the fruit in a group of people the church who love God and who love each other where lives are transformed by Jesus which then go on to transform communities and transform cities as people look on to the church and see God's people loving each other caring for one another with a kind of concrete commitment that we see here and they think that is beautiful you don't see people relate to each other anywhere else in the world like they do in the church and so whether we're a missionary serving in another country or we're the only Christian perhaps in our workplace or perhaps we're parents who want to raise our children to know and love Jesus what Paul's saying here is let's not become weary in doing good let's keep going keep going keep sowing and wait for the harvest to come and he says we must do good to all people that means everybody without restriction it sounds impossible but then he adds as we have opportunity so we're not to worry about not being able to help people who aren't around us but we do have the responsibility of doing good to all the people who are around us the people that we can physically see who are there and he says especially to those who belong to the family of believers because we've been adopted into God's family as God's people so we've got brothers and sisters in Christ to love and care for us and we have to love and care for them which is why the local church a church like ours Christ Church Glasgow should be the kind of place that as people who've got no no interest in Christianity or Jesus Christ or anything like that the church should be the kind of place that people look on and they see those people really love each other they do good to one another and they really care for each other because if people look on and they don't see that then we've failed haven't we here's just a quick example I've got plenty but just one

when when families in our church have babies what happens is that the rest of the church family rally together to provide meals for a week or two weeks for the parents who've just had children and without fail I'm always told from the parents that their friends discover that their church has been giving the meals for a couple of weeks and they ask them what kind of place is that how how do people end up just giving you two weeks worth of meals and it is because the quality of our relationships in the church should be of such an extent should be so concrete that they're so different they're so beautiful and they're so radical because it's as people look on at the church and they see people relating in this kind of way that the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is visible it's not just theory but it's seen in how people relate to one another so how do we cultivate relationships like this then well it's not just by trying harder because it will never work if we try harder because we're all too selfish listen to what

Adele the singer songwriter had to say and she was on the cover of Vogue magazine's November issue the UK issue I don't normally read Vogue or subscribe to Vogue but dentist teeth waiting room and and Vogue was there but listen to what Adele said she was the cover star and she was interviewed inside about her her new album and basically her life and so as she wrote and she was interviewed this is what she said she said that this new album of hers was to help explain divorce to her son and so she said I just felt like I wanted to explain to him through this record when he's in his 20s or 30s who I am and why I voluntarily chose to dismantle his entire life in the pursuit of my own happiness and then she also said about her divorce she said it just wasn't right for me anymore meaning our marriage I didn't want to end up like a lot of other people I knew I wasn't miserable miserable but I would have been miserable had I not put myself first and so can you see we're not knocking Adele because there's a sense in which we all want to put ourselves first and yet the reality is that all true relationships if they're really going to be a relationship all true relationships require self-sacrificial love because if we are always going to pursue our own happiness and put ourselves first in all our relationships then those relationships will never flourish that is if they exist at all and I think parenting is such a great example of this and that's why Adele's words are so sad because parenting requires years and years and years of self-sacrificial love for your children we will need to give our life for them as it were if we are to see them flourish then we will need to sacrifice much of ourselves and so this is ultimately modeled for us in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ for us so Jesus Christ willingly came into this world knowing that he would give his life for ours he died on a cross for our sin so that we can be put right with God so he came it was his death for you his death for your life it was his sacrifice for you his sacrifice to make you and me whole it was his service for you and me his service to meet our greatest need and so it is only as we remember the work that Jesus Christ has done for us by dying on the cross that we will then be prepared to sacrificially love and serve others and that's when we will be ready to do good to them and that kind of sowing right now in our relationships will reap eternal life for ourselves but also for others God will use our relationships as they are think of all the people in your sphere God will use those relationships to do his work and it might seem dull and boring and ordinary but it is actually counter-cultural and it is totally revolutionary and Christianity