### “Wipe the Dust Off” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 6, 2025

**Galatians 6:1–5**

1 My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfillthe law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own loads.

**Luke 10:1–11**

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ 6 And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. . . 10But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’”

Today’s lesson will get us to think about our neighbors, but also about ourselves. Let’s dive into the Paul passage first. There’s an interesting complexity there. It says “bear one another’s burdens” (6:2), but it also says “all must carry their own loads” (6:5). So which one is it? Do we need to go help out other people, or do we need to be responsible for our own loads? Why can’t both be true? We need to be both generous *and* responsible.

Maybe the verse that ties it all together is verse 4, which tells us to test our own work. Be critical of your own actions, and don’t compare yourself with others. Presumably, we will test and assess whether we are sufficiently helping others who need help, but also whether we are responsibly bearing our own burdens. It doesn’t say we should never ask for help, but it does seem to say that we need to be responsible for our own load. In fact it is a sign of discernment to realize when you do need help and to ask for it, as well as offering assistance to others.

Now the gospel passage talks about the seventy evangelists that Jesus trained and appointed to be traveling preachers. They are to be peaceable and to be happy to stay at the first house that invites them in. But if a town is unwelcoming, then they are to wipe the dust of that place off their sandals, but let them know that the kingdom of God has come near, and they missed it (Luke 10:11).

This idea can be valid even for those of us who are not full-time evangelists. We can wish peace on all the people we meet, but there ultimately will be some people to whom we will need to bid adieu, and even good riddance, which I think is what is signified by wiping their dust off your feet. You’ve probably had these experiences, where you needed to say “sayanora” to someone because they proved to be dishonest or larcenous or poisonous in some way. And there are times we need to cut someone off, not invite them in any more. It doesn’t mean we don’t forgive them, but it *does* mean we don’t give them any more opportunities to do harm. Nowadays we call these toxic persons.

Now, can we still follow the advice in Galatians that we should receive back someone “in a spirit of gentleness” if they have transgressed? Yes, I think so, at least once. But if someone proves himself unreachable by grace, if he shows himself to be a repeat offender who doesn’t learn, then there comes a time to wipe his dust off your shoes and say “goodbye,” without remorse. It’s not just *our* compassion that needs to work, the offender also needs to feel true remorse; they have to *want* to repair the relationship.

Now, if there is wrongdoing within a congregation, Jesus provides a procedure for handling that. In Matthew 18 Jesus says that if someone “sins against you,” you should go to him alone and point out what he has done wrong. If he won’t listen to you, then approach him again with one or two witnesses. The goal, of course, is to save the relationship, to keep people in the community. But if he still won’t admit what he did was wrong, then bring the matter before the whole congregation, and if he won’t listen, then he can be banished from the congregation (Matt 18:15–17). Of course, that is only at the end of the process. At first, you seek peace and reconciliation, but also fairness. You are not supposed to be a helpless victim.

With the three-step method, we can save friendships, and even build real and lasting friendships. A friend is someone in whom you can confide, and with whom you can be vulnerable. With a friend, you are not alone in this world; you will probably find that you have had similar reactions to life situations.

But there are some who won’t allow the repair of relationships. The church is not supposed to allow misbehavior to go on. It is better, Matthew 18 says, that a millstone were hung around our necks, than that we allow mistreatment of “one of these little ones” (Matt 18:6). Church hierarchies are finally beginning to take this seriously, as regards sexual misconduct by clergy.

So my message is that we should try to obey the advice given in both Galatians and Luke. Bear one another’s burdens; be compassionate and helpful. Test your own work, and your own behavior. Wish peace upon people whom you meet, but if they reject you, be willing to walk away. That latter instruction also means to not resent them. Wipe them off completely, so that you walk away but don’t carry resentment against them. Resentment will oppress you and crush you, if you let it. Close that chapter and leave that book on the shelf.

In summary, bear one another’s burdens, but don’t bear resentment or guilt. If you are actually guilty, then go and do something about it. Apologize and try to make reparations. But if you’re not guilty, don’t carry *that* burden. And don’t oppress yourself with anger and self-pity. Let it go. Don’t carry any dust. Carry only light and learning and love. Be ready for new experiences, even if they aren’t the ones you planned for. There may be plenty of dust you will need to shake off. But you can still carry peace in your heart.