

# Galatians 6:1-11, 17-18

## An Outline

- I. Walking by the Spirit Exemplified in Burden Sharing (Galatians 6:1-11).
  - A. Guidelines for Burden Sharing (vv. 1-6)
    1. Spirit-led believers should restore sinning Christians (v.1)
      - a. It should be done gently (v. 1a).
      - b. It should be done cautiously (v. 1b).
    2. Spirit-led believers should carry each other's burdens to fulfill the Law of Christ (v. 2).
    3. Burden sharing requires a right perspective (vv. 3-5).
      - a. True ministry is not by them but by the Spirit through them (v. 3).
      - b. Believers must not measure themselves by others but take responsibility for their own actions (vv. 4-5).
    4. Those instructed should bless those who instruct them (v. 6). – cf. Matthew 24:31-46
  - B. Significance of Burden Sharing (vv. 7-11).
    1. God will make sure everyone reaps what they sow (vv. 7-8).
      - a. God will surely judge (v. 7).
      - b. Living by the flesh will lead to destruction (v. 8a).
      - c. Living by the Spirit will lead to eternal life (v. 8b).
    2. Believers should persevere in doing good (v. 9-10)
      - a. Believers should not be weary in Spirit-led living (v. 9a).
      - b. Persevering believers will gain an eternal harvest (v. 9b).
    3. Paul's personal charge to do good (vv. 10-11).
      - a. Instruction to do good to all and especially Christians (v. 10).
      - b. Paul adds emphasis by writing the words himself without amanuensis (v. 11).
- II. Final warning against Judaizers (Galatians 6:12-17)
  - A. Judaizers operated out of pride, fear, and hypocrisy in their desire for the Galatians to be circumcised (vv. 12-13).
  - B. The true Israel of God operates out of a Christ-exalting, non-worldly humility in view of being made a new creation in Christ (vv. 14-16).
  - C. Paul validated the sincerity of his message by the scars from his suffering for Christ (v. 17).
- III. Paul closes his letter with a prayer entrusting the Galatians to God's grace (Galatians 6:18).

## Questions for Study

1. **Even though Paul instructs believers to restore sinning brothers in Galatians 6:1, why does it appear that his instruction seems more for the restorer than for the one being restored in Galatians 6:1-5?**

Paul's exhortation for the Galatian believers to restore one caught in sin follows the teaching of Christ in Matthew 18, where Jesus commanded private confrontation of sin with a view to "win them over" (Matthew 18:15). James also commended the restoring of a sinning brother or sister as that which would "save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19). In Matthew, Jesus focused on what to do if the confronted brother refused to repent (Matthew 18:16ff). James focused on the benefit of those being confronted. In Galatians Paul focuses on the attitude of the one doing the confronting. He writes that the restoration should be done by a believer "who is spiritual" and be done with "gentleness," a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Paul warns the believer to watch out that they do not get tempted. This warning is echoed in Jude 22-23,

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, **mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.**

In what way may the restorer get tempted? Falling into the same sin is always a risk; however, there are other pitfalls, not the least of which is spiritual pride. Paul warns, "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves" (Galatians 6:3). He warns against comparing themselves with the spirituality of those they are helping (6:4). In keeping with the theme of Galatians, Paul is very concerned that the Galatians confront sin on the basis of grace. His two warnings dealt with their attitude toward each other.

If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (5:15).

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (5:26).

In other words, Spirit-led love should be the guiding principle that governs every confrontation and restoration (cf. Galatians 5:6,13-14,23; cf. 2 Timothy 2:25-26).

2. **Paul spent five chapters arguing against the Law (of Moses), is he now pushing for a new set of rules, even more rigorous, under the "Law of Christ" in Galatians 6:2?**

Paul wrote that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13) and that "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (5:18). Is he now pushing another law, the Law of Christ? Yes and No. It is another law but qualitatively different. The Law of Christ does not bring into bondage, trapping in sins, but sets believers free, liberating to do righteousness (cf. James 1:25). The Law of Moses brought a curse and condemnation and provided no power to overcome sin. The Law of Christ arises from grace (John 1:17; Ephesians 2:8-10) and salvation (Philippians 2:12-13) and provides the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:13). While the burden of the Law of Moses was impossible to bear (Acts 15:11-12), the yoke of the Law of Christ is easy and light (Matthew 11:28-30). Here's how God works to bring this about according to Galatians: Through faith God supplies to us the Spirit of Christ (Galatians 3:5). Through the Spirit we produce the fruit of love (Galatians 5:22). Through love we fulfill the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Therefore, if you trust in Jesus, you will fulfill His law of love, bearing the spiritual burdens of others (cf. John 13:34-35).

3. **Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Is he contradicting himself when a few verses before, he wrote, “Then they can take pride in themselves alone” (Galatians 6:4)?**

In short, NO. In Romans 12, we find a parallel exhortation from Paul.

**For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you...We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us” (Romans 12:3, 6).**

When Paul speaks of boasting, even self-boast, it is always in the context of boasting in what God has given or done in us:

**It is because of Him** that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God: our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: **“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; cf. 2 Corinthians 10:17).

**But by the grace of God I am what I am**, and His grace to me was not in vain. No, I worked harder than all of them—**yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except **what Christ has accomplished through me** in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— (Romans 15:17-18).

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do **it all for the glory of God** (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Peter conveys the same message, that all that we speak and do are by God and for His glory:

If anyone speaks, he should speak as one conveying **the words of God**. If anyone serves, he should serve with **the strength God provides**, so that **in all things God may be glorified** through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

Now, Paul acknowledges that apart from this in-working of Christ, he is nothing. He writes, “There dwells in me, that is in my flesh, no good thing” (Romans 7:18). Jesus taught, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In 1 Corinthians 3:7 Paul writes, “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:5; Romans 15:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 15:10.).

So in Galatians 6:4, the self-testing and taking pride in oneself without comparing oneself to others is not for the purpose of self-glory but rather glorying in Christ, who works in and through us. So Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “I will boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Again, in Galatians 6:14, Paul declares, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As in Galatians 6:4, so in 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul exhorts believers to test themselves “to see whether you are in the faith...Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test.” Here again, the test is not how “good you are,” but whether Christ is in and working in you, because every righteous act we do, true believers recognize that it is Christ doing it through us. So Paul declares, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). And in John 3:21, we read: “But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be **accomplished by God**” (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

While Paul taught humility, carrying each other's burdens in love, being more wary about one's own spiritual standing rather than comparing with others, the Judaizers did just the opposite (cf. Galatians 6:12-13). They pushed circumcision on the Galatians because they feared men more than God and sought the praise of men over God. Their motives were not pure. They thought more highly of themselves and so justified using the Galatians to serve their ends. They were also hypocrites because they demanded of the Galatians what they did not do themselves.

**4. In the context of Galatians 6:1-6, what does Paul mean by exhorting those instructed to share all good things with those who instruct them in the Word (Galatians 1:6)?**

At first glance, this seems an unusual place to instruct on giving, but upon deeper consideration, it fits perfectly. As spiritual believers are encouraged to instruct and restore sinning brothers and sisters, it is only fitting that those receiving such instruction should care for those instructing them. When Jesus sent out the Twelve and then the Seventy-two, He told them to not take any money or supplies but find provisions from the homes and villages that welcomed them (Matthew 10:9-10; Luke 10:5-9). Jesus weighted the receiving of His disciples and their message with the utmost seriousness, so that how His disciples were received would determine how God would judge the people (cf. Luke 10:10-16; Matthew 10:14-15). In fact, Jesus' famous parable about sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is not about Christian charity but rather the judgment of people, who either accept or reject the disciples of Christ and their Gospel message. The disciples are representatives of Christ. That is why He said,

"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me (Matthew 10:40).

Therefore, when He said in Matthew 25:40, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," Jesus had His disciples in mind. Jesus was not identifying with every needy soul, but those He had chosen to represent Him and carry His Gospel message. That is why He can also say of those that reject His disciples: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46). Rejecting Jesus' disciples was tantamount to rejecting the Gospel, for that is the message the disciples bore.

Paul may have had this parable of Christ in mind when he wrote of sowing and reaping, of destruction and eternal life, in the immediately following verses (Galatians 6:7-8).

If unbelievers will be judged in this way, how much more should believers welcome and support those who teach, preach, evangelize and share the Word of God? In Jesus' parable, He spoke of feeding them when they are hungry, giving them drink when they are thirsty, inviting them when they are strangers, clothing them when they are needy, tending them when they are sick, and visiting them when they suffer imprisonment and persecution for their faith (cf. Matthew 25:35-36). In this way, we are supporting Christ Himself, for we support His messengers and His message.

Therefore, the "all good things" that Paul has in mind includes more than money. It means companionship, encouragement, supplies, prayer, etc. This too fulfills the Law of Christ, the principle of love, the bearing of one another's burdens.

Even though Paul chose for the most part to support himself in order to maximize the impact of his ministry, he taught that ministers of the Gospel had the right to receive support, just as any other worker (1 Corinthians 9:3-12; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

**5. Paul writes that those who sow to the flesh will reap destruction and those who sow to the Spirit will reap eternal life in Galatians 6:8. Is he suggesting that believers, who sow to the flesh, can lose their salvation?**

John Piper takes a controversial stand on these verses, arguing that since these verses were written to Christians, the threat of eternal damnation hung over Christians who sowed to please their flesh rather than the Spirit. While it is true that eternal life is in view in Galatians 6:8, just as eternal damnation was in view in Galatians 5:21, I would not automatically conclude that this was a genuine threat to Christians, for to say so would suggest that Christians could lose their salvation, which is contrary to the teaching of verses like Romans 11:29, John 10:27-30, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Titus 3:5-7, and 1 John 3:11-13. Instead, I believe Paul, as John does in his epistle, characterizes the unbeliever when he speaks of those “who sow to please the flesh,” which is literally, “those who sow unto the flesh.” I believe this parallels Paul’s characterization of unbelievers in Romans 8:1-14 as those “who live according to the flesh” and who “are in the realm of the flesh” and is without the Holy Spirit living in them. These are in contrast to Christians, who “live according to the Spirit” (8:4) and “are in the realm of the Spirit” and has the Holy Spirit living in them (8:9) and “are led by the Spirit” as “children of God” (8:14).

Just as Paul exhorted believers to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and to “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25), he is doing the same thing in Galatians 6:9-10, encouraging believers to persevere in doing good. The reaping of a harvest in Galatians 6:9 does not need to be exclusively the “eternal life” in verse 8 but like the “100, 60 and 30 fold” that Jesus spoke of in His parable about the soils (Matthew 13:23). Christians who persevere in doing good will reap an eternal harvest, add to their treasures in heaven, and gain rewards.

Therefore, I would understand “sow to please their flesh” as identifying the way of the Judaizers (cf. Galatians 6:12-13 in contrast with Paul in Galatians 1:10; 6:17). If we read these good works as a condition for salvation, even final salvation, it would undercut what Paul has been writing throughout the entire book. Not at any point has Paul argued for self-effort in any part of salvation. True believers recognize they are “nothing” and their self-effort amounts to “nothing.” What counts is “the new creation” in Christ! (Galatians 6:15). This new creation applies to everyone who is in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). When we sin or start to rely on self-effort, we are not living in keeping with our new nature but following our old nature, our flesh, which was crucified with Christ (cf. Galatians 5:24 and 6:14). The way of the flesh is always destruction and hell-bound; however, just because Paul writes this way does not mean Christians are now in danger of damnation. Paul is simply saying, live like the saved person you are and not like the hell-bound unbeliever you were.

**6. Why does Paul mention writing in large letters and with his own hand in Galatians 6:11? What does he mean that he bears in his body the marks of Jesus in Galatians 6:17?**

“Large letters” may indicate either emphasis or a malady in Paul; however, the important part is that Paul wrote in his own hand and not by an amanuensis in order to stress the significance of what he wrote. The marks on his body I take to be the scars he received in his suffering for the Gospel, which demonstrate his irreproachable sincerity. These punctuate his letter with the utmost seriousness.

**7. Paul begins and ends his letter with “grace.” Compare Galatians 1:6 with 6:18. Why is grace so important to Paul’s message in Galatians?**

In Galatians 1:6 Paul noted that the Galatians were abandoning the grace of Christ as the true Gospel and going to a false gospel. So in Galatians 6:18 Paul again commends them to the true Gospel of God’s grace in Christ so that they may once again understand that their salvation is by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross alone! (cf. 6:14; 2:21).

## Question for Discussion

Paul exhorts believers to restore those caught in sin (Galatians 6:1-5). They are to do this with the Word of God (Galatians 6:6; 2 Timothy 3:16). They are to approach with gentleness (6:1) with a view to restoration (cf. Matthew 18:15). They are to be careful not to approach with any kind of spiritual pride (6:3). They are to approach with the humility that recognizes the plank in their own eye as they seek to help remove the speck from their brother or sister's eye (6:4-5; Matthew 7:1-5). Remember, these instructions pertain to fellow believers, not to unbelievers.

Share with one another about occasions when you have confronted others about their sin or when you have been confronted. You don't have to be graphic or overly detailed. Focus on the principles that relate to our study with respect to the proper attitude and approach. It may involve your spouse, your children, your Christian friends or co-workers, or fellow believers at church.