

Freedom to Fulfill Responsibilities

Galatians 6.1-10

Introduction

It is important to remember that Paul’s line of thinking did not end with the chapter break that was placed in our bibles hundreds of years after his death. What is written in the first ten verses of chapter 6 is not given in isolation from the instruction just given in chapter 5. The Galatian churches were in crisis. Judaizing teachers had infiltrated and were teaching a new gospel. Their churches were filled with confusion, strife, pride, and competing factions. We must not forget the *biting and devouring* of each other in 5.15 and the *provoking* and envying of each other in 5.26. There were probably at least two factions – one consisting of Jewish Christians who tirelessly campaigned for the inclusion of the rites of Mosaic law in Christian practice – and the other consisting of Gentile Christians who were unwilling to comply.

So, how does the Spirit led person help bring healing and unity back to a church divided? What is listed in Galatians 6.1-10 encompass both congregational as well as individual responsibilities to one another and to God. It is very important to see how the responsibilities of the local church are intermingled with individual accountability here:⁵

Verse	Collective Responsibility <i>verb in plural form</i>	Individual Responsibility <i>verb in singular form</i>
6.1	You who are spiritual <i>restore</i> such a person...	<i>Watching out</i> for yourselves...
6.2	<i>Carry</i> one another’s burdens...	
6.4		<i>Examine</i> his own work...
6.5		<i>Carry</i> his own load...
6.6		<i>Share</i> all his good things...
6.7		Whatever a person <i>sows</i> he will also <i>reap</i> ...
6.9	Let us not <i>get tired</i> of doing good...	
6.10	Let us <i>work</i> for the good of all...	

⁵ Hansen, G. Walter. *Galatians*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

6.1: Restoring Sinners, Examining Yourself

Galatians 6:1

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted.

The Church's Responsibility: Promote An Atmosphere of Healing

Those who are spiritual have the responsibility to restore the person who has sinned. Before going any farther, Paul presents this in a way that assumes members in the congregation will sin. The occurrence of moral failings within the church should not shock us. The crucial factor lies in how the church reacts to such lapses. A reaction rooted in rigid judgment according to the law can have a devastating effect, crushing the individual at fault and causing rifts within the congregation. This was the case with the Galatian churches, where legalistic zeal led to merciless treatment of those who erred. However, Paul advocates for a different approach. He sees moral failings as moments for those guided by the Spirit to demonstrate its fruits—offering restoration to the individual and building unity in the church.

Who the command in verse 1 is directed to is written in the plural form.⁶ *You who are spiritual...* the directive here is to the congregation. As the church works to bring healing to the one who has sinned, empathy is required. Paul characterizes the one caught in sin as having been *overtaken or caught in sin*. Sin not only harms others: the sinner himself becomes a casualty. Often, those who cause harm have themselves been harmed. They are overwhelmed and captivated by sin's power. Paul is not absolving them of their responsibility, but rather acknowledging sin's potent, ensnaring force. Echoing Jesus' words that *everyone who sins is a slave to sin*, John 8.34, Paul says that sin entraps the sinner. Viewing those who have morally erred as trapped or enslaved enables us to meet them with compassion. This attitude should inspire within us a desire to assist them in overcoming the shackles of sin in their lives.

The Imperative

The imperative in 6.1 is to *restore* the sinner. This word is used in other places to describe the mending of a broken bone or fixing a torn net, Matthew 4.21; Mark 1.19. The idea is to help something return to a condition where it functions well or is restored to its former condition, by cleaning, mending, or folding together. Spiritually, it refers to advancement toward spiritual maturity or being more adequately equipped for spiritual service, 2 Corinthians 13.11; Ephesians 4.12; 1 Thessalonians 3.10; Hebrews 13.21. Linking this back to the division in Galatia, Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 1.10 to address the fracturing Corinthian church. There Paul urged them to *be united* (restored) to *have the same understanding and the same conviction*. So here, the imagery associated with the word *restore* is a call for spiritual therapy so that a broken member of the body can once again function properly and provide a benefit to all.

⁶ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

How the Imperative is Employed

Paul says the restoration is to be carried out *with a gentle spirit*. This is one of the fruits of the Spirit just mentioned, 5.23. Gentleness should never be equated with weakness. Rather, it is strength under control. When compassionate believers encounter a brother or sister entangled in sin, their response must not be one of fiery outrage or haughtiness. No matter how shocking a sin may be, no matter how damaging consequences, a compassionate person maintains emotional composure and directs their will towards lovingly guiding the sinner toward the healing found in Christ. The congregation has a responsibility to promote an atmosphere of healing, not judgment.

The Individual's Responsibility

In the second part of verse 1 Paul shifts his focus to the individual. *Watch out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted.*⁷ The collective response of the church is only effective when each individual is personally committed to humbly evaluating his attitude and actions before God. Personal self-examination is critical because no one is immune to the lure of temptation. Recognizing your own susceptibility to moral failure serves a dual purpose: it acts as a safeguard against the enticements of sin and cultivates a spirit of gentleness when confronting someone ensnared by sin.

As we connect this back to the Galatian context, it appears many were filled with the urge to react with self-righteous indignation and wrath towards the wrongdoing of another. Remember, Paul has just addressed this in 5.26 and will do so in 6.3-4. Legalism often gives rise to a climate of judgment, where individuals are quick to attack sinners by *biting and devouring each other*, 5.15. Their own transgressions, marked by pride, 5.26 and explosive anger, 5.20, were just as grave as the offenses of those they were judging so severely. Instead, those guided by the Spirit acknowledge their own status as sinners redeemed by grace. This understanding of personal frailty and the dependence on God's redeeming love informs and shapes their interactions with fellow sinners.

6.2-5: Carrying Burdens and Evaluating Your Own Work

The Congregation's Responsibility

Galatians 6:2

2 Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Once again, Paul shifts his focus to the congregational responsibility as he instructs those in churches to *carry one another's burdens*. This is the application of the principle introduced in 5.13: *serve one another through love*. What kind of burden does Paul have in mind? In the immediate context, it seems to refer to the burden(s) created by the sin in 6.1. Sin always has a cascading effect. One lapse in judgment leading to moral failure can lead to a lifetime of problems and regret. So, those in the congregation are directed to come along side and walk with these brothers and sisters who are experiencing the turmoil of damaged relationships and various consequences initiated by the sin itself. This involves the choice to

⁷ Ibid.

respond in love, warmth, and acceptance of the person – despite their sin. It involves getting involved in messy lives. It offers encouragement and comfort as the person works through their situation.

Obviously, the *burdens* of verse 2 can apply to much more than sin. People in local congregations suffer with many differing kinds of physical, emotional, and mental burdens. Some are fighting financial issues. Others are dealing with cancer, divorce, wayward children, and an innumerable listing of other things. When we *carry other's burdens*, we are taking the initiative to look for things people bear that they haven't yet allowed into public view. This is not for the purpose of judgment, but it springs forth naturally from a heart that cares.

Paul says when we do this, we *fulfill the law of Christ*, 6.2b. The way to obey the law of Christ is to *help* sinners in the church, not to *exclude* them from the church. Paul uses the law of Christ in 6.2 in a similar way as he uses the love commandment in 5.13–14. Both are similar statements about serving one another: “serve one another in love” and “carry each other's burdens.” Both are connected to the idea of fulfillment: “the whole law is summed up” (literally, “fulfilled”) and “you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

The law of Christ is the love commandment as shown, affirmed, and intensified by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. He loved sinners and gave himself for them, 2.20; he took on the heavy load of the law's curse against them on the cross, 3.13; he freed them from the heavy yoke of bondage under the law, 5.1. Therefore, all who belong to Christ and are guided by the Spirit will also meet the high standard of love set by Christ's life, death, and resurrection: like him, they will love sinners and carry their burdens. This kind of love service reflects Christ's love and thus obeys Christ's law.

The Individual's Responsibility

Galatians 6:3–6

3 For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

4 Let each person examine his own work, and then he can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else.

5 For each person will have to carry his own load.

6 Let the one who is taught the word share all his good things with the teacher.

Verses 3-5 call for a humble spirit that submits to personal evaluation. Verse 6 seems to call for engaging in sweet fellowship with each other. How the testing of verses 3-5 is to be carried out is seen in three ways:

6.3: Be Aware of the Danger of Self-Deception

Just before this Paul has warned the Galatians about the problem of *conceit*, 5.26. Pride causes a person to think more highly of themselves than they should, Romans 12.3. It often leads to just what Paul identifies here at the beginning of the verse. Pride leads a person to believe *himself to be something when he is nothing*, 6.3a. Some are so proud of their own achievements that they look down upon and ignore the call to be a servant carrying out the burdens of others. Pride is a central factor in keeping people from fulfilling 5.13b. Instead, pride *provokes*, 5.26. Let's not also forget another portion of Paul's writing where he says,

If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing, 1 Corinthians 13.2.

We always need to be aware of the problem of self-deception, 6.3b.

6.4: Personal Examination Focuses on Oneself, not in Self-Comparison with Others

Let each person examine his own work, Paul says. To “examine” means to observe or look over carefully to inspect. One dictionary says it means to determine the genuineness of. By what do we make this examination? Our standard is the law of Christ, which is *faith working through love*, 5.6. We should be asking, *is my faith being demonstrated in Christlike actions of love?*

If the answer is yes, then Paul says *he can take pride in himself alone*. If anything remains after thorough and honest self-examination, it will be the type of boasting that boasts only in the Lord, 2 Corinthians 10.12-18. Christians can only boast regarding what God has done in and through Him – on the basis of one’s faithfulness – not on his or her personal accomplishments compared to another.

6.5: Carry Your Own Load

How does the instruction here coincide with verse 2 where we are instructed to carry the burdens of others? In verse 2 the word is “burdens.” In verse 5 the word is “load.” The first refers to helping someone who cannot bear the burden created by sin. The latter refers to the work God gives us individually. Part of that work is learning how to carry the burdens of others. As we perform the self-evaluation of verse 4, we determine whether we are reflecting the love of Christ (our load) through serving others in love (carrying their burdens).

6.6: Build Your Brother Up

Commonly we have taken this verse to refer to the need for local churches to pay their preachers. Preacher support is biblical, Luke 10.7; 1 Corinthians 9.7-14. But upon closer examination, how does this fit in the overall context of what Paul has been discussing in the Galatian context? Everything heretofore has focused on the restoration of sinning brethren and the recovering of congregational unity. So then, what are the *good things* to which Paul refers to in verse 6? Maybe a better rendering of the verse is the way the New American Standard translates it:

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

“Share” in this verse is taken from the word commonly used for fellowship. This is not so much about one way giving to another person (the preacher or teacher) as much as it is both (teacher and student) sharing or having fellowship *together*.

Sharing in what? *Good things*, Paul says. These are things which are useful and beneficial.⁸ These good things are most often referred to as things of spiritual and moral excellence (see Romans 10.15; Hebrews 9.11) and not monetary compensation. So, as we are working to restore the fallen brother, we are *teaching them the word* in whose good things we share in fellowship together.

6.7-8: Each Person Must Choose

⁸ Ibid.

Galatians 6:7-8

7 Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap,

8 because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

What Paul has been presenting leads each person to a decision ... as the spirit-based life and the ways of the flesh cannot coexist. Which path will the readers of this letter choose? There is no room for neutrality. They will either live by the Spirit *or* walk by the flesh. How one decides will determine one's spiritual destiny.

...for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit, Galatians 6.7b-8.

Sow to the flesh?

Those who sow to the flesh will destroy the connection and bond they have with other Christians, 5.15, 26, thru the pursuit of rivalries, uniformity, and personal pride. This path always leads to separation from God.

Sow to the Spirit?

However, those who sow to the Spirit through serving each other in love, restoring those caught in sin, carrying their burdens, sharing together in fellowship, and doing good unto all live inside of God's favor. They will *reap eternal life from the Spirit*, 6.8b.

6.9-10: Sowing to the Spirit Requires Great Effort on the Part of Everyone in the Church

Galatians 6:9-10

9 Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.

6.9: Don't Grow Weary

Inside the congregation (Paul's focus here shifts back to congregational responsibility), there must be an atmosphere that encourages the hard work of doing good. Each person is responsible for contributing to this. Here Paul recognizes the real problem of exhaustion to the point of giving up. When a congregation is continually plagued by factionalism, strife, and division, it can become very easy to give into fatigue. Some are tempted to simply quit. So, all need to be reminded that *we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up*, 6.9b. When the local church is full of love generated by the Spirit, there will be a harvest of love and good works. We need to keep in

mind this does not happen immediately (even the farmer must sow in patience waiting on the proper time for the harvest), but the promise remains.

6.10: Serve Others in the Lord's Name

Everyone is to look for opportunities to serve one another in the name of the Lord. *Let us work*, means that our congregations are to be active, working effectively and with diligence in taking every opportunity God provides to sow for His glory.

For what do we work? *For the good of all*. This is the same word Paul has just used in verse 6. It is the goodness of moral and spiritual excellence that is the fruit of the Spirit, 5.22. **It is especially noteworthy that Paul chooses not to use the word *kalos* here, which refers to goodness in physical and temporal things (money and goods).** Instead, when we allow Him, the Spirit creates internal goodness in our hearts, and this goodness then manifests itself in external goodness through our words and actions.

Do Good Unto All

This goodness is also absolute and universal, to be shown to everyone, including unbelievers. Peter said:

For such is the will of God, that by doing right you silence the ignorance of foolish people, 1 Peter 2.15.

A good way to counter criticism of Christianity is for Christians to do good to unbelievers. Kindness will be more effective in bringing someone to Christ than the most well thought out argument. Kindness should be the core of every Christian's heart. Paul told Titus:

in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us, Titus 2.7-8.

Later in the same letter Paul says:

... concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and beneficial for people, Titus 3.8.

Especially For Those Who Belong to the Household of Faith

Our love for God should be first demonstrated our love for our fellow believers in Christ.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death, 1 John 3.14.

If someone says, "I love God," and yet he hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother and sister whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God must also love his brother and sister, 1 John 4.20-21.

This kind of love leads to joyful harvest, and it is also a powerful testimony to those who are not saved. How we treat each other is our best appeal to a world that is looking for love, kindness, and mercy.

What's In This for Us?

Some possible practical application points from this bible class lesson are:

Compassion and Gentleness are Never to be Neglected

We should be compassionate and gentle towards brothers and sisters who fall into sin and seek to restore them to spiritual health and fellowship, rather than judging them harshly or excluding them from our fellowship. We need to also be aware of our own vulnerability to temptation and sin and examine ourselves regularly.

Carry the Burdens of Others

We should help each other carry the burdens that result from sin or other difficulties in life, such as guilt, shame, consequences, pain, or suffering. We should also fulfill our own responsibilities and duties before God, and not compare ourselves with others or boast in ourselves. Our boasting is only in God.

We Share Good Things with Others

We should enjoy the sweetest fellowship with each other through the sharing the good things that we have received from God. Fellowship is not just one sided ... it is mutual ... where the one who restores and the one restored share in the spiritual blessings in Christ.

Do Good unto All

We should not grow weary or give up in doing good to others, especially to our fellow believers in Christ. We should remember that God will reward us in due time if we persevere in following his will and continue to sow to the Spirit. We should also look for opportunities to serve others in love and kindness and reflect Christ's love to the world.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned how to live by the Spirit and fulfill the law of Christ in our relationships with one another. The Spirit-led person seeks to restore sinners with gentleness and compassion, while watching out for their own temptation and sin. He or she carries one another's burdens that result from sin or other difficulties in life and carry their own load of responsibilities and duties before God. This person will share the good things that they have received from God with those who walk together with them in the faith. And finally, they will not grow weary or give up in doing good to others, especially to their fellow believers in Christ.

May we never forget that all this enables us to be a powerful witness to those who are not saved and silence the criticism of those who oppose the gospel. Pray that God will help you to live by the Spirit and fulfill the law of Christ in your daily life.

For Thought and Reflection

Lesson Outline

1. 6.1 – Restoring Sinners & Examining Yourself

- Local Church: promote an atmosphere of healing by restoring the sinner
- Individual: watch out for yourself

2. 6.2 – Carrying burdens and Evaluating Your Own Work

- Local Church: carry each other's burdens
- Individual:
 - engage in personal evaluation
 - build up your brother

3. 6.7-8 – Each Person Must Choose How to Respond

- Will he sow to the flesh?
- Will he sow to the Spirit?

4. 6.9-10 – Sowing to the Spirit Requires Great Effort

- Do not grow weary
- Do good unto all

For Thought and Discussion

1. How can we identify and help those who are caught in sin in our congregation? What are some practical ways to restore them gently and watch out for ourselves?
2. What are some burdens that we or others may be carrying in our lives? How can we help each other carry these burdens and fulfill the law of Christ?
3. How often do we examine our own work and motives? How can we avoid comparing ourselves with others or boasting in ourselves?
4. How do we share the good things that God has given us with those who teach us and instruct us in the faith? How do we support and appreciate them in their ministry?

5. What are some examples of sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit in our lives? What are the consequences of each? How can we sow more to the Spirit and less to the flesh?
6. How do we overcome weariness or discouragement in doing good? How do we keep our hope and trust in God's reward in due time?
7. How do we work for the good of all, especially the household of faith? What are some opportunities to serve others in love and kindness?

Group Activity:

Divide into small groups and discuss the following scenarios involving the responsibilities of living by the Spirit:

Scenario 1: You notice that a fellow church member has been absent from the worship services for several weeks. You learn that he has fallen into alcoholism and depression. How would you approach him and restore him gently?

Scenario 2: You have a friend who is going through a difficult divorce and is struggling to cope with the emotional and financial stress. She has two young children who need care and support. How would you help her carry her burden and fulfill the law of Christ?

Scenario 3: You have been working hard on a project at your workplace and you are proud of the results. However, you discover that your colleague has been taking credit for your work and has received praise and recognition from your boss. How would you examine your own work and avoid comparing yourself with others or boasting in yourself?

Scenario 4: You have been attending a bible class taught by a faithful and knowledgeable teacher. You have learned a lot from his lessons and have grown in your faith. However, you also know that he is facing some financial difficulties and health issues. How would you share the good things that God has given you with him and support him in his ministry?

Scenario 5: You have been tempted to indulge in some worldly pleasures that you know are contrary to God's will. You have been rationalizing that it is not a big deal and that you can still be a good Christian. However, you also feel guilty and convicted by the Spirit. How would you sow more to the Spirit and less to the flesh and avoid the consequences of sowing to the flesh?

Scenario 6: You have been doing good deeds for others. However, you feel like your efforts are not making a difference and that the world is still full of evil and suffering. You wonder if God is pleased with you and if He will reward you. How would you overcome weariness or discouragement in doing good and keep your hope and trust in God's reward in due time?

Scenario 7: You have an opportunity (group participants decide what the opportunity is) to work for the good of all. However, you also have some personal or professional commitments that may conflict with your involvement. How would you prioritize your work for the good of all and serve others in love and kindness?

Final Encouraging Word:

Living by the Spirit and fulfilling the law of Christ is not an easy task. It requires constant vigilance, self-examination, and cooperation with God. It also involves loving and serving others, even when it is inconvenient, difficult, or costly. However, living by the Spirit also brings great joy, peace, and satisfaction. It aligns our lives with God's will and purpose. It also assures us of God's presence, power, and reward. Strive to live by the Spirit and fulfill the law of Christ in our daily lives.