

Restoring a Brother

Galatians 6:1-5

With Study Questions

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Galatians 6:1-5

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵ For each one shall bear his own load (Galatians 6:1-5).

Works of the Flesh – Fruit of the Spirit

On the one hand you have the works of the flesh, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, etc. (Galatians 5:19). Those who practice – those who willingly submit and whose lives can be defined as whole-heartedly participating in – these things will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

On the other hand you have those who walk in the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, etc. (Galatians 5:22). A true Christian will, at some level, produce this fruit. The distinction here is between the believer and the unbeliever.

The difference, in terms of behavior, is not one of perfection versus imperfection. The Christian, having been justified by faith alone, is, by the indwelling Spirit of God, being conformed into the image of Christ. He is no longer under absolute dominion of his sinful nature.

The man who walks in the flesh is still wholly under the control of his fallen nature, the world, and Satan. Though the natural man may not behave as poorly as he possibly can all the time, his rejection of Christ makes even his best works reprehensible before God, for there is no sense in which his works are designed for the pleasure of or obedience to God; his loyalties lie with another god.

A spouse may dress nicely, put on make-up, perfume, cologne, etc. so that they are very pleasing to the eye. They may appear outwardly beautiful to their wife/husband. But if it is found that they are dressing to please another, then we view the behavior as a tribute to infidelity.

Walking in the Spirit, contrary to the thinking of some, is not a form of Christian perfectionism – that Christians will reach a level of absolute righteous living prior to heaven. This becomes evident in Chapter Six.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass... (Galatians 6:1a)

Those who walk in the flesh need conversion. Here Paul is addressing Christians who are overtaken in a trespass and require restoration. There is a clear distinction between being overtaken in a trespass and walking in the flesh.

Being overtaken carries with it the idea of being caught off guard versus a willful premeditation – falling into sin through lack of circumspection. This person looks at their own life and asks, “How did I get myself into this mess and (more importantly) how can I get out?”

A person might fudge a little on their business dealings; tell a little white lie to avoid hurting someone’s feelings; start flirting with the wrong person – one thing leads to another and the trespass (a false step, a lapse from uprightness)¹ has overtaken him. He didn’t wake up looking for trouble but he wasn’t circumspect (aware of his surroundings) enough to see the trouble knocking at his door and now it has taken residence.

...you who are spiritual ... (Galatians 6:1b)

A couple of qualities are implied in the designation *spiritual*. First, that he is not the man who is walking in the flesh but who is walking in the Spirit; the spiritual man is a Christian² Second, the spiritual man is not presently overtaken in a trespass himself – logs before specks (Matthew 7:3-5). It would be a safe assumption that the spiritual man is currently exhibiting maturity and stability.

...restore such a one... (Galatians 6:1c)

The mature Christian is to help restore or mend the brother caught in a trespass. This word, *restore*, could be used regarding a dislocated or broken limb which needs to be set before it can heal properly. Unless you are Rambo, it is quite difficult to set your own broken bone. The tense suggests the necessity for patience and perseverance in the process. The same word is used in the mending of nets (Matthew 4:21), which can be a very tedious process.

...in a spirit of gentleness... (Galatians 6:1d)

We are not told here the *what* in terms of restoring a brother or sister; it would surely include a prayerful, verbal confrontation of some sort, godly counsel, perhaps the bringing in of others (Matthew 18:15-17), repeated checking in on their success in the matter, etc. We are, however, told the *how* of restoring the brother – in a spirit of gentleness.

Gentleness or meekness was discussed under the fruit of the Spirit. The meek person accepts this task as one given to him from God.

Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity (calmness) of

¹ Trespass, here, is a lapse from uprightness. It is a false step. Though we are all sinners and live in a constant state of sin, there is a distinction between man’s normal state of sinfulness and a clear moral misdeed.

² Someone might argue that a non-Christian can correct a Christian’s behavior (was not Abraham chastised for lying about Sarah by a pagan king?). But true restoration involves a person’s disposition toward God. The natural man will never be concerned about that.

spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all.³

Excellence in restoring another requires a lack of preoccupation with self. If God has providentially brought this matter before you, you don't ask, "Why must I deal with this?" Instead you pray that God will grant you the ability to handle things with wisdom and grace.

Let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one (Colossians 4:6).

Accusatory tones and dispositions are not helpful. Neither is it wise to assume that all people respond the same way to confrontation. A good coach knows which players respond well to a raised voice and which players need a gentle nudge. In all cases, a good confrontation is one in which the guilty party recognizes a loving motive.

The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up (Ecclesiastes 10:12).

In all our efforts we must also know that the final success is determined, not by us but by God. In a parallel passage, Paul writes,

...in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

...considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1e).

Wrapped up in this admonition is the continual awareness that you (a grammatical shift from plural to singular) may find yourself in a similar situation – "there but for the grace of God go I." We may find the temptation of which Paul writes present in the very way we deal with the sin of another, e.g. impatience, self-righteousness, etc.

Bear one another's burdens... (Galatians 6:2a).

The word for one *another* carries the connotation that the other person is similar to you. Christians form a body; they are a family – part of the same team and same type. Seeking to extract oneself from this body in an effort to enjoy autonomy⁴ or project some false veneer of mystery and strength is both selfish and foolish. At some point in time you will need someone to bear your burden and quite often you will need to bear the burden of another.

³ Vine, W. 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. Revell: Old Tappan NJ

⁴ The person who seeks to be autonomous will eventually fall into just that *auto* (self) *nomos* (law); self-law will take precedence over God's law.

...and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2b).

Paul may be speaking a little tongue-in-cheek here. The Judaizers emphasized the keeping of the Mosaic Law (namely circumcision) for justification. Having been justified by faith, how then should we live? Paul writes of the law of Christ. This is not some new system of ethics foreign to the Old Testament. It is here demonstrated by bearing one another's burdens. Earlier Paul had equated it to love in general

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

To elaborate further, this is the keeping of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40), not to earn justification, but as the fruit of justification.

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Galatians 6:3).

This does not mean that there are some men who really are something and that it is only those particular individuals who are nothing who shouldn't deceive themselves into thinking they are something. Neither is it some morbid self-contempt but rather the false thought that one is incapable of falling into sin.

It would be better understood that since all men, in terms of being exempt from temptation, are nothing (not able to claim such a righteous title), he who wishes to appear as if he were not in this category of men and persuades himself that such is the case, deceives himself. In other words, "Get off your high horse, this could be you tomorrow."

But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another (Galatians 6:4).

Of course, if there is this stratification in the church between those who are "something" and those who are not, we will continually examine whether or not we have ascended into the higher club. Paul writes against this "comparison" Christianity here. Anyone who wishes to play the comparison game, remember Who you ought to mirror, Christ Himself.

Examine your own life. Where were you yesterday compared to today? Paul boasted of (if that is the best word) and rejoiced in a clear conscience and godly sincerity (2 Corinthians 1:12). This is not to be confused with pride and perfectionism but the recognition and enjoyment of God's sanctifying work in one's life contrasted with taking pride over others.

For each one shall bear his own load (Galatians 6:5).

We will never stand acquitted of our sins because of the gross sin of others. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We should avoid comparing our successes with the success of others. In terms of restoration in humility, we are to bear one another's burdens; in terms of self-

evaluation, we are not to console ourselves in the failures of others. We know neither their past nor their hearts. In terms of the heart, we are to examine only our own.

Questions for Study

1. Compare and contrast walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit (page 1).
2. In what respects is it possible for someone walking in the flesh to do good (page 1)?
3. What is the difference between being overtaken in a trespass and walking in the flesh (pages 1, 2)?
4. Who is "spiritual" (page 2)?
5. Define "restore" (page 2)?
6. How ought a person restore another (page 2)?
7. Why is considering ourselves valuable in helping us to be gentle with others (page 3)?
8. Why is autonomy both selfish and foolish for Christians (page 3)?
9. What does it mean to fulfill the law of Christ (pages 3, 4)?
10. How is one who thinks himself to be something deceiving himself (page 4)?
11. Why is it improper and foolish to compare our own work with the work of others (page 4)?