

Galatians 6
August 14, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Do you ever get tired of doing good for others? If so, how do you overcome your weariness?
[Let people engage]

Transition: “One another” is one of the key phrases in the Christian’s vocabulary. “Love one another” is found at least a dozen times in the New Testament, along with “pray one for another” (James 5:16), “edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11), be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10), “use hospitality one to another” (1 Peter 4:9), and many other like admonitions.

We are in the final chapter of Galatians, and Paul is going to emphasize that the Spirit-led Christian thinks of others and how he can minister to them. He doesn’t want us to become weary in doing good. Moreover, he wants us to do good to *all people, especially to the family of believers*. Let’s read the text and watch how Paul expands on this.

BOOK:

Doing Good to All

6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load.

⁶ Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature (his flesh) will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Not Circumcision but a New Creation

¹¹ See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

¹² Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which (or whom) the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

¹⁷ Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Christians have a measure of responsibility **to all people to do good**, when the occasions arise. When Jesus fed the 5,000, both saved and unsaved participated. So the benevolence of Christians should not be restricted, except that believers are to have the priority. As in a home, family needs are met first, then those of the neighbors.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 721–728)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Galatians 6:1–10

The story has often been told about the message the founder of the Salvation Army sent to their international convention. General William Booth was unable to attend personally because of ill health, so he cabled the delegates a message containing one word: “OTHERS!”

In the popular comic strip “Peanuts,” Lucy asks Charlie Brown, “Why are we here on earth?” He replies, “To make others happy.” She ponders this for a moment and then asks, “Then why are the others here?”

“One another” is one of the key phrases in the Christian’s vocabulary. “Love one another” is found at least a dozen times in the New Testament, along with “pray one for another” (James 5:16), “edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11), prefer one another (Rom. 12:10), “use hospitality one to another” (1 Peter 4:9), and many other like admonitions.

In the section before us, Paul adds another phrase: “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). The Spirit-led Christian thinks of others and how he can minister to them. In this section, Paul describes two important ministries that we ought to share with one another.

Bearing Burdens (Gal. 6:1–5)

The legalist is not interested in bearing burdens. Instead, he *adds* to the burdens of others (Acts 15:10). This was one of the sins of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day: “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be born and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23:4). The legalist is always harder on other people than he is on himself, but the Spirit-led Christian demands more of himself than he does of others *that he might be able to help others*.

Paul presents a hypothetical case of a believer who is suddenly tripped up and falls into sin. The word *overtaken* carries the idea of being surprised, so it is not a case of deliberate disobedience. Why does Paul use this illustration? *Because nothing reveals the wickedness of legalism better than the way the legalists treat those who have sinned*. Call to mind the Pharisees who dragged a woman taken in adultery before Jesus (John 8). Or that Jewish mob that almost killed Paul because they *thought* he had defiled the temple by bringing in Gentiles (Acts 21:27ff). (Legalists do not need facts and proof; they need only suspicions and rumors. Their self-righteous imaginations will do the rest.) So, in this paragraph, Paul is really contrasting the way the legalist would deal with the erring brother, and the way the spiritual man would deal with him.

A contrast in aim. The spiritual man would seek to restore the brother in love, while the legalist would exploit the brother. The word *restore* means “to mend, as a net, or to restore a broken bone.” If you have ever had a broken bone, you know how painful it is to have it set. The sinning believer is like a broken bone in the body, and he needs to be restored. The believer who is led by the Spirit and living in the liberty of grace will seek to help the erring brother, for “the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22). “By love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). When Jesus sought to be a physician to the sinful, He was severely criticized by the Pharisees (Mark 2:13–17), and so the spiritual believer today will be criticized by the legalists.

Instead of trying to restore the erring brother, the legalist will condemn him and then *use the brother to make himself look good*. This is what the Pharisee did in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–14). “[Love] shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). The legalist rejoices when a brother falls, and often gives the matter wide publicity, because then he can boast about his own goodness and how much better his group is than the group to which the fallen brother belongs.

This is why Paul admonishes us, “Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26). The word *provoke* means “to challenge to a contest, to compete with.” The believer who walks in the Spirit is not *competing* with other Christians or challenging them to become “as good as he is.” However, the legalist lives by competition and comparison, and tries to make himself look good by making the other fellow look bad.

A contrast in attitude. The Spirit-led believer approaches the matter in a spirit of meekness and love, while the legalist has an attitude of pride and condemnation. The legalist does not need to “consider himself” because he pretends he could never commit such a sin. But the believer living by grace realizes that no man is immune from falling. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). He has an attitude of humility because he realizes his own weaknesses.

But there is a second contrast: he knows the love of Christ in his own heart. “The law of Christ” is: “Love one another” (John 13:34; 15:12). Paul has already discussed the “law of love” (Gal. 5:13–15), and now he is applying it. “Tender loving care” is not a modern invention, because Paul is urging it on believers in this passage. How much we appreciate it when the doctor uses tenderness as he sets a broken bone. And how much more should we use “tender loving care” when we seek to restore a broken life.

It takes a great deal of love and courage for us to approach an erring brother and seek to help him. Jesus compares this to eye surgery (Matt. 7:1–5)—and how many of us feel qualified for that?

Paul probably has in mind here our Lord’s instructions on reconciliation (Matt. 18:15–35). If your brother sins against you, go talk to him privately, *not* for the purpose of winning an argument, but for the purpose of winning your brother. (That word *gained* is the same word Paul uses in 1 Cor. 9:19–22 to refer to winning the lost to Christ. It is important to win the lost, but it is also important to win the saved.) If he hears you, then the matter is settled. But if he will not agree, then ask one or two spiritual people to go with you. If he will still not settle the matter, then the whole church must be informed and take steps of discipline. But Jesus goes on to point out that the church must practice prayer (Matt. 18:19–20) and forgiveness (Matt. 18:21–35), or discipline will not be effective.

The legalist, of course, has no time for this kind of spiritual “soul-winning.” When he hears that his brother has sinned, instead of going to the brother, he shares the sad news with others (“so you can pray more intelligently about it”) and then condemns the brother for not being more spiritual.

Remember, the legalist makes himself look better by making his brother look worse. Thus, Paul’s warnings here (Gal. 6:3–4). The Judaizers were guilty of boasting about themselves, their achievements, and their converts (Gal. 6:12–14). They usually did this by comparing themselves with others (see 2 Cor. 10:11). But such comparisons are sinful and deceptive. It is easy to find somebody worse off than we are, so that our comparison makes us look better than we really are. Christian love would lead us not to expose a brother’s failures or weaknesses, no matter how much better it would make us look.

A man should “prove his own work” (Gal. 6:4) in the light of God’s will and not in the shadows of somebody else’s achievements. “Each man should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each man should carry his own load” (Gal. 6:4–5, NIV). There is no place for competition in the work of God, unless we are competing against sin and Satan. When we see words like “best, fastest-growing, biggest, finest” applied to Christian ministries, we wonder who is getting the glory.

This does not mean that it is wrong to keep records. Charles Haddon Spurgeon used to say, “Those who criticize statistics usually have none to report.” But we must be careful that we are not making others look bad just to make ourselves look good. And we should be able to rejoice at the achievements and blessings of others just as if they were our own (Rom. 12:10). After all, if one member of the body is blessed, it blesses the whole body.

There is no contradiction between Galatians 6:2 and 5, because two different Greek words for *burden* are used. In Galatians 6:2 it is a word meaning “a heavy burden,” while in Galatians 6:5 it describes “a soldier’s pack.” We should help each other bear the heavy burdens of life, but there are personal responsibilities that each man must bear for himself. “Each soldier must bear his own pack.” If my car breaks down, my neighbor can help drive my children to school, but he cannot assume the responsibilities that only belong to me as their father. That is the difference. It is wrong for me to expect somebody else to be the father in our family; that is a burden (and a privilege) that I alone can bear.

Sharing Blessings (Gal. 6:6–10)

Just as *one another* is a key phrase in the Christian vocabulary, so is the word *fellowship* (translated “communicate” in Gal. 6:6). From the very beginning of the church, *sharing* was one of the marks of Christian experience (Acts 2:41–47). The Greek word has now worked its way into our English vocabulary, and we see the word *koinonia* here and there in religious publications. It simply means “to have in common,” and refers to our common fellowship in Christ (Gal. 2:9), our common faith (Jude 3), and even our sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10). But often in the New Testament, *koinonia* refers to the sharing of material blessings with one another (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 8:4; Heb. 13:16 [Greek text]). It is this that Paul has in mind in these verses.

He begins with *a precept* (Gal. 6:6), urging us to share with one another. The teacher of the Word shares spiritual treasures, and those who are taught ought to share material treasures. (Paul uses a similar approach when he explains why the Gentile churches ought to give an offering to the Jewish believers—Rom. 15:27.) We must remember that what we do with *material* things is an evidence of how we value *spiritual* things. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21).

Because the Apostle Paul did not want money to become a stumbling block to the unsaved, he earned his own living (see 1 Cor. 9), but he repeatedly taught that the spiritual leader in the church was to be supported by the gifts of the people. Jesus said, “The laborer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7), and Paul echoes this statement (1 Cor. 9:11, 14).

But we must realize the spiritual *principle* that lies behind this precept. God does not command believers to give simply that pastors and teachers (and missionaries, Phil. 4:10–19) might have their material needs met, *but that the givers might get a greater blessing* (Gal. 6:7–8). The basic principle of sowing and reaping is found throughout the entire Bible. God has ordained that we *reap what we sow*. Were it not for this law, the whole principle of “cause and effect”

would fail. The farmer who sows wheat can expect to reap wheat. If it were otherwise, there would be chaos in our world.

But God has also told us to be careful *where we sow*, and it is this principle that Paul deals with here. He looks on our material possessions as seed, and he sees two possible kinds of soil: the flesh and the Spirit. We can use our material goods to promote the flesh, or to promote the things of the Spirit. But once we have finished sowing, *we cannot change the harvest*.

Money sown to the flesh will bring a harvest of corruption (see Gal. 5:19–21). That money is gone and can never be reclaimed. Money sown to the Spirit (such as sharing with those who teach the Word) will produce life, and in that harvest will be seeds that can be planted again for another harvest, and on and on into eternity. If every believer only looked on his material wealth as seed, and planted it properly, there would be no lack in the work of the Lord. Sad to say, much seed is wasted on carnal things and can never bring glory to God.

Of course, there is a much wider application of the principle to our lives; because all that we do is either an investment in the flesh or the Spirit. We shall reap whatever we have sown, and we shall reap *in proportion* as we have sown. “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). The believer who walks in the Spirit and “sows” in the Spirit is going to reap a spiritual harvest. If his sowing has been generous, the harvest will be bountiful, if not in this life, certainly in the life to come.

Paul’s enemies, the Judaizers, did not have this spiritual attitude toward giving and receiving. Paul sacrificed and labored that he might not be a burden to the churches, but the false teachers used the churches to promote their own schemes and fill their own coffers. This is also what happened in the Corinthian church, and Paul had to write them: “In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face” (2 Cor. 11:20, NIV).

How many times we have seen the sacrificing godly pastor persecuted and driven out, while the arrogant promoter is honored and gets everything he wants. The carnal believer thrives under the “spiritual dictatorship” of a legalistic promoter-pastor, because it makes him feel secure, successful, and spiritual. The carnal believer will sacrifice what he has to make the work more successful, only to discover that he is sowing to the flesh and not to the Spirit.

Having given us the precept (Gal. 6:6) and the principle behind the precept (Gal. 6:7–8), Paul now gives us *a promise* (Gal. 6:9): “In due season we shall reap if we faint not.” Behind this promise is a peril: getting weary in the work of the Lord, and then eventually fainting, and stopping our ministry.

Sometimes spiritual fainting is caused by a lack of devotion to the Lord. It is interesting to contrast two churches that are commended for “work, labor, and patience” (1 Thess. 1:3; Rev. 2:2). The church at Ephesus had actually left its first love and was backslidden (Rev. 2:4–5). Why? The answer is seen in the commendation to the Thessalonian church: “Work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope.” Not just work, labor, and patience, but the proper motivation: “faith, love, and hope.” How easy it is for us to work for the Lord, but permit the spiritual motivation to die. Like the priests of Israel that Malachi addressed, we serve the Lord but complain, “Behold, what a weariness is it” (Mal. 1:13).

Sometimes we faint because of lack of prayer. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Prayer is to the spiritual life what breathing is to the physical life, and if you stop breathing, you will faint. It is also possible to faint because of lack of nourishment. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

If we try to keep going without proper food and rest, we will faint. How important it is to “wait upon the Lord” to get the strength we need for each day (Isa. 40:28–31).

But the promise Paul gives us will help to keep us going: “In due season we shall reap.” The seed that is planted does not bear fruit immediately. There are seasons to the soul just as there are seasons to nature, and we must give the seed time to take root and bear fruit. How wonderful it is when the plowman overtakes the reaper (Amos 9:13). Each day we ought to sow the seed so that one day we will be able to reap (Ps. 126:5–6). But we must remember that the Lord of the harvest is in charge, and not the laborers.

Sharing blessings involves much more than teaching the Word and giving of our material substance. It also involves doing good “unto all men” (Gal. 6:10). There are those in this world who do evil (Ps. 34:16); in fact, there are those who return evil for good (Ps. 35:12). Most of the people in the world return good for good and evil for evil (see Luke 6:32–35; 1 Thess. 5:15). But the Christian is supposed to return good for evil (Rom. 12:18–21) and to do this in a spirit of Christian love. Actually, the Christian’s good works are a spiritual sacrifice that he gives to the Lord (Heb. 13:16).

We are to “do good unto all men.” This is how we let our light shine and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). It is not only by *words* that we witness to the lost, but also by our *works*. In fact, our works pave the way for our verbal witness; they win us the right to be heard. It is not a question of asking, “Does this person deserve my good works?” Did we deserve what God did for us in Christ? Nor should we be like the defensive lawyer who tried to argue, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25–37) Jesus made it very clear that the question is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “To whom can I be a neighbor?”

As we “do good unto all men,” we must give priority to “the household of faith,” the fellowship of believers. This does not mean that the local church should become an exclusive clique with the members isolated from the world around them and doing nothing to help the lost. Rather, it is a matter of balance. Certainly, the believers in Paul’s day would have greater needs than would the outsiders, since many of the believers suffered for their faith (see Heb. 10:32–34). Furthermore, a man always cares for his own family before he cares for the neighborhood (1 Tim. 5:8).

We must remember, however, that we share with other Christians so that all of us might be able to share with a needy world. The Christian in the household of faith is a receiver that he might become a transmitter. As we abound in love for one another, we overflow in love for all men (1 Thess. 3:12).

This is how it was meant to be.

Galatians 6:11–18

It was Paul’s custom, after dictating a letter, to take the pen and write his own farewell. His standard signature was, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thes. 5:28; see 2 Thes. 3:17–18). But so concerned is Paul that the Galatians get the message of this letter that he takes the pen and writes *an entire concluding paragraph* with his own hand. “Look at the large letters I write with my own hand!”

Why did Paul write this paragraph, and why did he use such large letters? The Holy Spirit inspired him to add these closing words to give one more contrast between the legalists and the Spirit-led Christians, to show that the Spirit-led believer lives for the glory of God, not the praise of man. And he wrote in large letters for emphasis: “DON’T MISS THIS!”

Some Bible students believe that Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7–10; Gal. 4:14–15) was some kind of eye trouble. This would mean that he would have to write in large letters so that he himself would be able to read what he had written. Whether or not that is true, Paul is making it clear that he has something important to write in conclusion, that he is not simply going to end the letter in some conventional manner. If he did have eye trouble, his willingness to write this closing paragraph with his own hand would certainly appeal to the hearts of the readers.

He has shown them that the believer living under Law and the believer living under grace are diametrically opposed to each other. It is not just a matter of “different doctrine,” but a matter of two different ways of life. They had to choose between bondage or liberty (Gal. 5:1–12), the flesh or the Spirit (Gal. 5:13–26), and living for self or living for others (Gal. 6:1–10).

Now he presents a fourth contrast: living for the praise of men or the glory of God (Gal. 6:11–18). He is dealing with *motive*, and there is no greater need in our churches today than for an examination of the motives for our ministries. We know *what* we are doing, but do we know *why* we are doing it? A good work is spoiled by a bad motive.

Paul approaches this delicate subject in an interesting way. The legalists wanted to subject the Galatian believers to circumcision, so Paul takes this up and relates it to the work of Christ on the cross, and also to his own ministry. In this paragraph Paul presents three “marked men”—the legalist (Gal. 6:12–13), the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14–16), and the Apostle Paul himself (Gal. 6:17–18).

The Legalist (Gal. 6:12–13)

Paul does not have anything good to say about the legalist. He describes him and his kind in four ways.

They are braggarts (vv. 12a, 13b). Their main purpose was not to win people to Christ, or even to help the believers grow in grace. Their chief purpose was to win more converts so they could brag about them. They wanted to “make a fine impression outwardly” even though they did no good inwardly. Their work was not done for the good of the church or for the glory of God; it was done for their own glory.

While it is certainly not wrong to want to win people to Christ, or to see the work of the Lord increase, it is definitely wrong to want these blessings for the glory of man. We want to see more people sharing in our ministries, not so that we can count people, but because people count. But we must be careful not to “use people” to further our own selfish programs for our own glorification.

I receive a number of local church newsletters and newspapers. I was shocked to find an article in one of them in which the pastor named several other churches and proceeded to explain how his church was much better. Some of the churches he mentioned were not evangelical in belief, and I wondered what those members would think of Christ and the Gospel if they read his boastful critique. No doubt it made it difficult for the believers to witness to these other people once this pastor had condemned their churches.

They are compromisers (v. 12b). Why did they preach and practice circumcision and all that went with it? *To escape persecution.* Because Paul preached the grace of God and salvation apart from the works of the Law, he was persecuted (Gal. 5:11). The Judaizers tried to make the Christians think that they too were Christians, and they tried to make the followers of the Mosaic Law think that they too obeyed the Law. Consequently, they escaped being persecuted by the legalistic group for their identification with the cross of Christ and its devastating effect on the Law.

We are prone to look at the cross (and crucifixion) in a sentimental way. We wear crosses on our lapels or on chains around our necks. But to the first-century citizen, the cross was not a beautiful piece of jewelry; it was the lowest form of death and the ultimate in humiliation. The proper Roman citizen would never mention the cross in polite conversation. It stood for rejection and shame.

When Paul trusted Christ, he identified himself with the cross and took the consequences. To the Jew the cross was a stumbling block, and to the Gentile it was foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18–31). The legalists, emphasizing circumcision rather than crucifixion, won many converts. Theirs was a popular religion because it avoided the shame of the cross.

They are persuaders (v. 12a). The word *constrain* carries with it the idea of strong persuasion and even force. It is translated “compel” in Galatians 2:14. While it does not mean “to force against one’s will,” it is still a strong word. It indicates that the Judaizers were great persuaders; they had a “sales talk” that convinced the Galatian believers that legalism was the way for them. Whenever Paul presented the Word, it was in truth and sincerity, and he used no oratorical tricks or debater’s skills. (See 1 Cor. 2:1–5 and 2 Cor. 4:1–5 to see how Paul presented the Word to his listeners. Paul was not a politician; he was an ambassador.)

They are hypocrites (v. 13). “They want you to submit to the Law, but they themselves do not obey the Law.” The legalists belonged to the same group as the Pharisees about whom Jesus said, “They say and do not” (Matt. 23:3). Of course, Paul is not suggesting that the Judaizers *should* keep the Law, because keeping the Law is neither possible nor necessary. Rather, he is condemning them for their dishonesty; they had no intention of keeping the Law, even if they could. Their reverence for the Law was only a mask to cover their real goal: winning more converts to their cause. They wanted to report more statistics and get more glory.

Yes, the legalist is a marked man; so when you detect him, avoid him.

Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14–16)

Paul keeps coming back to the cross (Gal. 2:20–21; 3:13; 4:5; 5:11, 24; 6:12). “If righteousness come by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). The wounds of Calvary certainly make Christ a “marked Man,” for those wounds mean liberty to those who will trust Him. The Judaizers boasted in circumcision; but Paul boasted in a crucified and risen Saviour. He gloried in the Cross. Certainly this does not mean that he gloried in the brutality or suffering of the cross. He was not looking at the cross as a piece of wood on which a criminal died. He was looking at the cross of *Christ* and glorying in it. Why would Paul glory in the Cross?

He knew the Person of the Cross. Jesus Christ is mentioned at least forty-five times in the Galatian letter, which means that one third of the verses contain some reference to Him. The person of Jesus Christ captivated Paul, and it was Christ who made the Cross glorious to him. In his early years as a Jewish rabbi, Paul had much to glory in (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:1–10); but after he met Christ, all his self-glory turned to mere refuse. The legalists did not glory in the cross of Christ *because they did not glory in Christ*. It was Moses—and themselves—who got the glory. They did not really know the Person of the Cross.

He knew the power of the Cross. To Saul, the learned Jewish rabbi, a doctrine of sacrifice on a cross was utterly preposterous. That the Messiah would come, he had no doubt, but that He would come to die—and to die *on a cursed cross*—well, there was no place for this in Saul’s theology. The cross in that day was the ultimate example of weakness and shame. Yet Saul of Tarsus experienced the power of the Cross and became Paul the apostle. The cross ceased to be a

stumbling block to him and became, instead, the very foundation stone of his message: “Christ died for our sins.”

For Paul, the Cross meant *liberty*: from self (Gal. 2:20), the flesh (Gal. 5:24), and the world (Gal. 6:14). In the death and resurrection of Christ the power of God is released to give believers deliverance and victory. It is no longer *we* who live; it is Christ who lives in us and through us. As we yield to Him, we have victory over the world and the flesh. There is certainly no power in the Law to give a man victory over self, the flesh, and the Law. Quite the contrary, the Law *appeals* to the human ego (“I can do something to please God”), and encourages the flesh to work. And the world does not care if we are “religious” just so long as the Cross is left out. In fact, the world approves of religion—apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, the legalist inflates the ego, flatters the flesh, and pleases the world; the true Christian crucifies all three.

He knew the purpose of the Cross. It was to bring into the world a new “people of God.” For centuries, the nation of Israel had been the people of God, and the Law had been their way of life. All of this was preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:1–7). Now that Christ had come and finished His great work of redemption, God had set aside the nation of Israel and brought into the world a “new creation” and a new nation, “the Israel of God.” This does not mean that God is finished with the nation of Israel. Today, God is calling out from both Jews and Gentiles “a people for His name” (Acts 15:14), and in Christ there are no racial or national distinctions (Gal. 3:27–29). Paul clearly teaches, however, that there is a future in God’s plan for the Jewish nation (Rom. 11).

One purpose of the cross was to bring in *a new creation* (Gal. 6:15, NIV). This “new creation” is the church, the body of Christ. The “old creation” was headed by Adam, and it ended in failure. The new creation is headed by Christ, and it is going to succeed.

To the Romans, Paul explained the doctrine of the two Adams—Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12–21). The first Adam disobeyed God and brought into the world sin, death, and judgment. The Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) obeyed God and brought life, righteousness, and salvation. Adam committed one sin and plunged all of creation into judgment. Christ performed one act of obedience in His death on the cross, and paid for all the sins of the world. Because of Adam’s sin, death reigns in this world. Because of Christ’s victory, *we can “reign in life”* through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17). In other words, the believer belongs to a “new creation,” a spiritual creation, that knows nothing of the defects and limitations of the “old creation” (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

Another purpose of the cross was to create *a new nation*, “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). This is one of many names for the church found in the New Testament. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Peter identifies that nation as the family of God: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9).

As mentioned previously, this does not mean that the church has permanently replaced the nation of Israel in the program of God, but only that the church is “the people of God” on earth today just as Israel was in centuries past.

What a rebuke to the Judaizers. They wanted to take the church back into Old Testament Law, when that Law could not even be kept by the nation of Israel! That nation was set aside to make way for God’s new people, the church!

Believers today may not be “Abraham’s children” in the flesh, but they are “Abraham’s seed” through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:28–29). They have experienced a circumcision of the heart that is far more effective than physical circumcision (Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). For

this reason, neither circumcision nor the lack of it is of any consequence to God (Gal. 6:15; see also Gal. 5:6).

The Apostle Paul (Gal. 6:17–18)

There was a time when Paul was proud of his mark of circumcision (Phil. 3:4–6), but after he became a believer, he became a “marked man” in a different way. He now gloried in the scars he had received and in the suffering he had endured in the service of Jesus Christ.

The contrast with the legalists is plain to see: “The Judaizers want to mark your flesh and brag about you, but I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus Christ—for His glory.” What a rebuke! “If your religious celebrities have any scars to show for the glory of Christ, then let them be shown. Otherwise—stop bothering me!”

Paul is not claiming that he bore the five wounds of Calvary on his body. Rather he is affirming that he has suffered for Christ’s sake (something the legalists never did), and he had on his body the scars to prove it. When you read 2 Corinthians 11:18–33, you have no difficulty understanding this claim of his, for in many ways and in many places Paul suffered physically for Christ.

In Paul’s day, it was not unusual for the follower of some heathen god or goddess to be branded with the mark of that idol. He was proud of his god and wanted others to know it. In the same way, Paul was “branded” for Jesus Christ. It was not a temporary mark that could be removed, but a permanent mark that he would take to his grave. Nor did he receive his brands in an easy way: he had to suffer repeatedly to become a marked man for Christ.

It was also the practice in that day to brand slaves, so that everyone would know who the owner was. Paul was the slave of Jesus Christ, and he wore His mark to prove it.

It is worth noting that *sin brands a person*. It may mark his mind, his personality, even his body. Few people are proud of the sin marks they bear, and conversion does not change them. (Thank God, those changes will come when Jesus returns!) How much better it is to love Christ and live for Him and be “branded” for His glory.

Believers today need to remember that it is the Christian leader who has *suffered* for Christ who has something to offer. The Judaizers in Paul’s day knew nothing of suffering. They may have been persecuted in some small way for belonging to a religious group, but this is far different from “the fellowship of His [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10).

Beware of that religious leader who lives in his ivory tower and knows nothing of battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil, who has no “marks” to show for his obedience to Christ. Paul was no armchair general; he was out in the front lines, waging war against sin, and taking his share of suffering.

So, Paul comes to the end of his letter; and he closes just the way he began: GRACE! Not “the Law of Moses,” but THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

No more need be said, because that says it all.

Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Galatians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 609-611) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

D. A life of service (6:1–10)

A believer is free from the Law of Moses and possesses liberty in the Spirit, but he must fulfill the law of Christ, and this can be done in the power of the Spirit. Such a life involves sacrificial service directed toward sinning Christians, burdened Christians, the pastor-teachers, and all people.

1. TOWARD THE CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SINNED (6:1).

6:1. Paul deals with a hypothetical case of a Christian who is **caught** (*prolēmphthē*) **in a sin**, or better, is “caught by a sin.” The thought is that of someone running from sin but sin, being faster, overtakes and catches him. Two passages show how the legalists responded to such (cf. John 8:3–5; Acts 21:27–29). But a Christian should **restore** (*katartizete*, a word used in secular Gr. for setting broken bones and in the NT for mending fishing nets) **him**. The task of restoration is not to be undertaken by fledglings in the faith but by those **who are spiritual**, that is, believers who walk by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16), and who are mature in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; Heb. 5:13–14). Furthermore this delicate work must be done **gently** (*prautētos*; cf. Gal. 5:22) and with the consciousness that no one is immune from falling into sin (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12).

2. TOWARD THE CHRISTIAN WHO IS BURDENED (6:2–5)

6:2. A serving Christian lends a helping hand with heavy loads (*barē*; cf. comments on v. 5). Though the principle would apply to all burdens the context has special reference to the heavy and oppressive weight of temptation and spiritual failure. While the “spiritual” do the work of restoring, all believers are to become involved by prayer and encouragement. This, wrote Paul, will fulfill (*anaplērōsete*) **the law of Christ**, that is, the principle of love (cf. 5:14; John 13:34).

6:3–4. Something must be laid aside if a believer is to be a burden-bearer and that is conceit, an attitude that breeds intolerance of error in others and causes one to think he is above failure. The remedy for self-conceit is found in verse 4—everyone is told to **test** (*dokimazetō*; cf. 1 Peter 1:7) **his own actions**. This means that rather than **comparing himself** with others he should step back and take an objective look at himself and his accomplishments. **Then he can take pride in himself** over what God has done in and through his life (cf. Rom. 12:3). The Greek word *kauchēma*, rendered “pride,” means personal exultation, not sinful pride.

6:5. The Christian does in fact test himself by carrying **his own load**. This does not contradict verse 2 because the reference there is to heavy, crushing, loads (*barē*)—more than a man could carry without help. In this verse a different Greek word (*phortion*) is used to designate the pack usually carried by a marching soldier. It is the “burden” Jesus assigns to His followers (cf. Matt. 11:30). There are certain Christian responsibilities or burdens each believer must bear which cannot be shared with others. Jesus assured His disciples that such burdens were light.

3. TOWARD THE PASTOR-TEACHER (6:6–9)

6:6. One responsibility of each believer is to shoulder the financial support of the pastor-teachers in the church. Perhaps the Judaizers had influenced some of the believers to slack off in their support of the teachers, a special group who were giving their full time to this ministry and who were reimbursed for their labors (cf. 1 Cor. 9:7–14). This concept of voluntary giving to provide for the Lord’s servants was revolutionary since Jews were taxed for the support of their priests and Gentiles paid fees, made vows, etc., to sustain their religions. The admonition is clear

that as a teacher shares the good things of **the Word** of God, a believer is to reciprocate by sharing **all good things with his instructor**.

6:7–8. These verses elaborate on the previous exhortation. First, a solemn warning is sounded that **God cannot be mocked**. No man can snub (*myktērizetai*, lit., “turn up the nose at”) God whose rule, **a man reaps what he sows**, is immutable. Each sower decides what his harvest will be. If a person **sows to please his sinful nature**, that is, if he spends his money to indulge the flesh, he **will reap** a harvest that will fade into oblivion. On the other hand if he uses his funds to support the Lord’s work, or **sows to please the Spirit**, and promotes his own spiritual growth, he **will reap** a harvest that will last forever. Though a broader application of the principle is legitimate it seems clear that Paul was dealing primarily with the question of financial support of Christian workers in the Galatian churches.

6:9. But Christians may become discouraged with spiritual sowing because the harvest is often long in coming. In the face of this reality the apostle charged the Galatians **not to become weary** or **give up** because the **harvest** is sure. (Paul included himself as he no doubt contemplated his sometimes frustrating labors on behalf of the Galatian Christians.) The reaping will come at God’s **proper time**, which may be only in part in this life and in full in the life to come at the judgment seat of Christ.

4. TOWARD ALL MEN (6:10).

6:10. Christians have a measure of responsibility **to all people to do good**, when the occasions arise. When Jesus fed the 5,000, both saved and unsaved participated. So the benevolence of Christians should not be restricted, except that believers are to have the priority. As in a home, family needs are met first, then those of the neighbors.

This passage then speaks clearly about Christian social responsibility, but it should be noted that it is addressed to individual believers. The church is not an agency for social work, though individual Christians are charged to minister in this way as they are able and have opportunity (cf. Rom. 12:17–21).

V. Conclusion (6:11–18)

As Paul brought the Galatian letter to a close, he again emphasized some of the great issues discussed throughout the epistle. The conclusion contains both a summary and final statement of the issues the apostle felt so strongly about.

A. *Paul’s autograph* (6:11).

6:11. At this point Paul took the pen from his scribe and wrote the rest of the letter himself, a practice he often followed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). The **large letters** he used probably did not refer to the length of the epistle as some have suggested but to the size of the letters he inscribed. It may be that Paul wrote the conclusion in capital letters after the rest of the epistle was penned mostly in lowercase letters. While it has often been suggested that he did so because he was afflicted with weak eyesight, it is more likely, given the tone of the letter, that the apostle sought in this way to give a final emphatic thrust to his message.

B. *Paul’s adversaries* (6:12–13).

6:12–13. The Judaizers who insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 15:1), in summary, (1) were only men-pleasers (cf. Gal. 1:10) seeking **to make a good impression outwardly**; (2) were afraid of persecution (6:12b); (3) wanted to **boast** about the number of Galatians they hoped to win over to circumcision as a religious and merit-earning rite (v. 13). The legalists knew the offense of the Cross would be softened if they openly proclaimed justification by faith *and works* (i.e., circumcision) and if they could claim conversions to that position in Galatia.

C. Paul's boast (6:14–16).

6:14. The contrast is vivid as Paul declared his boasting to be **in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**. For the Judaizers the Cross was an object of shame; for Paul it was the object of glorying. They gloried in the flesh; he gloried in the Savior. The “Cross” speaks of the atonement of Christ with which Paul was identified (cf. 2:20) and by which **the world was crucified to Paul and he to the world**. The world system with all its allurements, fleshly displays, and religions of human effort was cast aside by Paul. He looked at the world as if it were on a cross—and the world looked at Paul as though he were on a cross.

6:15. In view of the Cross of Christ and a believer's new position with respect to the world, no outward religious symbol or lack of it **means anything** as a way of salvation (cf. 5:6). The only thing that matters is to be a part of the **new creation** by the new birth (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

6:16. **Peace and mercy** from God are available to those who walk according to **this rule**, that is, according to the message of salvation by grace through faith alone. This blessing is pronounced on believing Galatians and on believing Jews. (The NIV errs in translated **even to the Israel of God** rather than “and upon the Israel of God” as in the NASB.) While some believe that “Israel of God” is the church, the evidence does not support such a conclusion. First, the repetition of the preposition (“upon” or “to”) indicates two groups are in view. Second, all the 65 other occurrences of the term “Israel” in the New Testament refer to Jews. It would thus be strange for Paul to use “Israel” here to mean Gentile Christians. Third, Paul elsewhere referred to two kinds of Israelites—believing Jews and unbelieving Jews (cf. Rom. 9:6). Lest it be thought that Paul is anti-Semitic, he demonstrated by means of this benediction his deep love and concern for true Israel, that is, Jews who had come to Christ.

D. Paul's benediction (6:17–18).

6:17. Paul's calling as an apostle and the message he preached had been challenged by the Judaizers. He asked for an end to such **trouble**, and he offered as a final proof to his critics **the marks of Jesus** on his **body**. These “marks” (*stigmata*) meant signs of ownership such as were branded on slaves and cattle. Paul referred to the scars on his body, which were caused by persecution for Christ's sake (cf. 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 4:10–11; 6:5, 9; 11:24–25), because they demonstrated he was a slave of Christ and not just a people-pleaser.

6:18. Paul's final word of benediction is noteworthy. While no greetings or personal salutations dim the solemnity of the epistle, the apostle ended as he began, expressing his heartfelt desire that **the grace of God** would be their abiding portion (cf. 1:3). And uniquely among all of Paul's epistles he ends with a reminder of his love for them, calling them **brothers**. How could the Galatians fail to respond in obedience to the persuasive and ultimately tender appeal found in this letter?

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 572–573). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

CHRISTIAN LIVING (5:1–6:10)

Having secured the argument for freedom in Christ through justifying faith alone, Paul examined the nature of that liberty. While again rebuking the tendency to turn back to legalism, he also deplored the opposite extreme of license. Paul expertly showed that freedom in Christ is a Spirit-guided lifestyle within the limits of a new “law” given by Christ: the law of love.

Paul quickly warned against circumcision, which has no spiritual value in Christ. He reminded them that they could not keep part of the law and ignore the rest. And to attempt to be justified by keeping the law of Moses is to turn completely away from God’s grace. The route of spiritual freedom in Christ is faith, faith that shows love in the short run and that waits eagerly but patiently for the Christian’s eternal hope.

The apostle next laments how the false teachers had confused the Galatians, halting their forward progress in Christ. He longed for an end to the leaven of false teaching spreading among them, wishing that the agitators would do away with themselves. Still, he displayed confidence that the Galatian churches would return to a proper viewpoint.

The danger of misunderstanding freedom in Christ is a tendency toward self-indulgence, which can express itself in destructive words and actions toward other believers. True spiritual freedom manifests itself in love, both for God and for one another. Such loving behavior is against the grain of the flesh. Thus, it is necessary to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and thus be guided by the Spirit in our attitudes, decisions, and actions. To fail to follow the lead of the Spirit as a Christian is to manifest a sinful lifestyle that is unworthy of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the believer who is controlled by the Spirit shows forth qualities that reflect supernatural godliness beyond the requirements of the law.

Such a life of Spirit-prompted love does not go on automatically, however. It is necessary to remain consciously in step with the Holy Spirit, and it is easy to do otherwise. Even though the flesh was, in a very real sense, crucified with Christ, the tendency to pride, and even to gross sin, still exists. Mature Christians must, in the power of the Spirit, restore such errant believers. Also, they must be available to support Christians overloaded with cares or responsibilities. It is right for every person to work up to their capacity, but not go beyond it. Nor is it proper for a person to boast because someone else has fallen under a load within that person’s capacity.

The life of love even includes support of biblical teachers who have financial needs. These are the kinds of good works that bring about a long-term harvest of eternal worth. The opposite route of sowing to the flesh only eventuates in corrupt fruit. The difference in the two final outcomes is whether we choose to do what is right in all situations, especially toward fellow believers, here and now.

CONCLUSION (6:11–18)

At this point Paul began the conclusion to Galatians by taking the manuscript from his unnamed scribe and writing with large, bold script. He then effectively summarized the issues of the entire letter by setting the pridefulness of those pushing circumcision on the Galatians over against the cross of Christ and the new creation that begins when a person becomes a believer. The apostle then pronounced a benediction of peace and mercy upon all Gentile and Jewish believers with proper perspective. He requested peace for himself in regard to the persecution he had suffered

for the sake of the message of the cross and new creation. He ended as he began, and proceeded throughout, with a note of grace (1:3; 2:21).

Fields, W. C. (1972). *Galatians*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 743–744). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Implications of Christian Freedom (Gal. 5:1–6:10)

The passage—The writer once more appeals to the good sense of the readers. They are free. They are not afflicted with endless ceremonies, bothersome rituals, lengthy dietary laws, and a lot of unessentials. But they do have obligations!

Circumcision is used as a symbol of the entire ceremonial law. It has no inherent spiritual or moral worth. It does not justify man before God. It is a matter of the flesh, not the spirit. This prompts Paul to illustrate the outworkings of the gospel. He lists some typical actions of the natural man, “works of the flesh” (5:17–21) and compares them to some characteristics of the redeemed man, calling these “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22–26).

The new life in Christ sets the believer free from the unproductive works of the law and turns him to works of compassion for his fellowman (6:1–10). Christian freedom must not be confused with license. We are, in a sense, under a new law, the law of love. Believers have a moral and ethical responsibility to each other in spontaneous response to God’s love.

Special point—In 5:4 Paul is simply saying that there can be no salvation by the law. Those who take this route come up to the point of God’s grace, up to the point of faith in Jesus Christ, but do not accept. They turn away without entering God’s grace. “Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God’s grace” (TEV).

Summary (Gal. 6:11–15)

Paul autographs his letter and calls particular attention to his distinctive signature, possibly as a warning against forgeries. He repeats the central theme of the letter that faith alone frees the believer from the penalty of sin. The thought of the conflict among the Galatian Christians on this point calls forth from him an exclamation of undying loyalty to Christ who alone is able to make men truly free.

Benediction (Gal. 6:16–18)

To all who accept the principle of faith he has outlined in his letter, to “the Israel of God” (KJV), “all God’s people” (TEV), Paul wishes peace and mercy. He refers to the only glory he desires, the landmarks of his witness to the Lord Jesus. In conclusion, he utters a prayer that would appear frequently in letters which would follow.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Galatians 6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.