

Gal 6:14-18

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
through which the world has been crucified to me,
and I to the world.

For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision,
but only a new creation.

Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule
and to the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one make troubles for me;
for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.

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

Jerome Biblical Commentary

6:1. *you who are spiritual*: The mature Christians are addressed, those guided by the Spirit (1 Cor 3:1). They are to correct a man “detected in some sin” (cf. Mt 18:15-18; Jas 5:19-20).2. *the Law of Christ*: Freed of obligation to the Mosaic Law, the Christian becomes *ennomos* Christou, “under the Law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21) and a “slave of Christ” (1 Cor 7:22). The “law of Christ” is the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2), and in this context it is specified as the law of love, for Christians must bear the burdens of one another in fraternal charity (→ Pauline Theology, 79:160).3. *thinks he is somebody*: Either because he thinks he is without sin, or that he is charitable enough to correct an erring brother.5. *his own load*: Not to be confused with the “burdens” of 6:2.6. *share all good thing*: Another practical manifestation of love is to be shown in due support for the catechists of the community; cf. 1 Cor 9:11; Phil 4:15; Rom 15:27.8. *will reap eternal life*: This verse sums up 5:16-26. “Eternal life” is the equivalent of the “kingdom of God” (5:21). The former expression is characteristically Johannine, occurring only rarely in Paul (Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:22-23; 1 Tm 1:16; 6:12; Ti 1:2; 3:7).

32 (V) Conclusion (6:11-18). Paul’s Signature and Résumé.11. *with my own hand*: Thus far the letter has apparently been dictated to a scribe (→ [NT](#) Epistles, 47:19). Paul now writes the conclusion himself by way of a “signature.”12. *not to be persecuted for Christ’s cross*: According to Paul, the Judaizers fear that if they preach the real “message of the cross” (see comment on 5:11), they might be persecuted for it by the Jews or other Judaizers. They prefer to make a good showing before men by preaching circumcision instead.13. *not even the circumcised*: The pf. ptc. *peritētmēmenoi* seems to be the preferable reading (P⁴⁶, B, Koine); other [mss.](#) read the pres. participle “Those who are being circumcised.” The context refers to the Judaizers. *do not observe the Law themselves*: Although they insist on circumcision and a few other legal obligations, the Judaizers do not observe the Law in its entirety. Hence Paul’s warning in 5:3; cf. Rom 2:21-25.14. *to boast in anything but the cross*: To the vanity (6:12) of the Judaizers Paul opposes his own boast; it is not one of self-reliance, but of dependence on the grace and favor of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 2:2; 2 Cor 11:16-12:10). “Cross” here means the whole Christ-event. *through which [or whom] the world has been crucified to me and I to the*

world: The word kosmos denotes all that stands at enmity with God—the sphere of pleasures and ambitions related to the “flesh” in which the Judaizers find their boast. To all this Paul has died (2:19; 5:24), not by some interior psychological or mystical experience, but through the historic event of Calvary, which is the realization of the Father’s salvific plan. The pf. tense expresses the condition in which he finds himself through his share in the Christ-event by baptism (Rom 6:3-11).15. *circumcision means nothing*: Echo of 5:6; cf. 1 Cor 7:18-19. *but a new creation*: This is the concluding declaration of what is really of prime importance in Christianity: a new ontological reshaping of man’s existence, not through a mere extrinsic norm of conduct, but through a lifegiving principle that is the Spirit of Christ. This is accomplished through the doxa of the Risen Christ (2 Cor 3:18-4:6). Man thus transformed in Christ becomes a new “creature.” The word ktisis has the active sense of “creation” only in Rom 1:20; elsewhere it is passive, i.e., “creature, created thing.” Cf. 1 Cor 7:19; 15:47-49; Rom 6:3ff.; Col 3:10; Eph 2:10; 4:24; Ti 3:5 (“rebirth”). (See E. Sjöberg, *ST* 9 [1956] 131-36.)16. *the Israel of God*: The Christian people of God, as the new “offspring of Abraham” (3:29; cf. Phil 3:3; Rom 9:6), in contrast to “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor 10:18). In this greeting Paul modifies the last words of Ps 124:5 or 128:6, “Peace be upon Israel.” The extension of the blessing beyond those immediately addressed follows the model of contemporary Jewish blessings. Cf. the 3rd cent. Kefr Bir’im Synagogue inscription: “May peace be upon this place and all the places of Israel....” (K. Galling, *Textbuch z. Geschichte Israels* [Tübingen, 1950] 82 § 56.)17. *the marks of Jesus*: The *Gk* word stigmata did not mean what this word means in English today. Paul had suffered so much from illness (4:13; 2 Cor 12:7), floggings (Acts 16:22; 2 Cor 11:25), and stoning (Acts 14:19) for the cause of Christ that he could speak of the evidence of these sufferings as “brands” that mark him as the “slave of Christ Jesus” (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10) forever. In antiquity stigmata often designated the branding used to mark a slave or an animal as someone’s possession. These “marks” in his flesh Paul gladly bears, boasting of them to those who would try to glory in another mark in the flesh (circumcision).18. Cf. Phil 4:23; Phlm 25; 2 Tm 4:22. In calling the Galatians “brothers,” Paul finally implies his reconciliation with them.

[NT](#) New Testament

[mss.](#) Manuscripts

[ST](#) *Studia theologica*

[Gk](#) Greek

Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Ver. 2. One another's burdens. This is not contrary to what is added ver. 5, that *every one shall bear his own burden*, because in the first place the sense is, that we must bear patiently with one another's faults and imperfections; in the second, that every one must answer for himself at God's tribunal. (Witham) --- Every one has his failings and weaknesses, and stands in need of indulgence from his brethren; he must, therefore, grant to them what he so much desires to receive from them. (Calmet)

Ver. 6. *Communicate....in all good things*: by this *communication*, is understood an assisting of others in their wants. (Witham) --- Such as are blessed with the goods of this world, should gladly communicate a share of their efforts to the preachers and teachers of the true faith; and this not merely as a return for what they have received, but also that they may be made thereby partakers of their merit. (St. Augustine, lib. 2. evang. quæst. q. 8.)

Ver. 7. This is addressed to the avaricious, who, under various pretexts, excused themselves from contributing to the support of their teachers. But they are here informed, that their excuses will not screen them from the anger of God. (Calmet)

Ver. 8. *He that soweth in his flesh*, &c. The apostle represents the flesh and the spirit like two fields, on which men sow good or bad seed, according to which they shall reap. (Witham)

Ver. 9. Works of mercy are the seed of life everlasting, and the proper cause thereof, and not faith only.

Ver. 10. *The household of the faith*: those who profess the same true faith. (Witham) --- We are more bound to assist Christians than Jews; Catholics than heretics. (St. Jerome, q. 1. ad Hedibim.)

Ver. 11. *What a letter I have written....with my own hand*. St. Jerome understands this of what he is now beginning to write, the rest being written by the hand of another. Others understand the whole letter. (Witham) --- St. Chrysostom, Theophylactus, and Theodoret, suppose that the apostle wrote the whole epistle with his own hand, and here excuses himself for writing so ill the Grecian letters, which were so very different from those of his native language. But St. Jerome understands, that he wrote only this latter part of the epistle, as a testimony that the whole came from him. (Calmet)

Ver. 12-13. He tells them the false teachers would have them circumcised first, to avoid *persecution* from the Jewish party; and secondly to glory in having made them their proselytes. (Witham)

Ver. 14. As for my part, I will *glory* in nothing *but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, but in Christ crucified. (Witham)

Ver. 15. *But a new creature*; but to be born anew, to receive the spiritual life of grace. (Witham)

Ver. 17. *I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body*, by the stripes and wounds I have received for preaching the gospel. (Witham) --- Formerly it was not unusual to stamp certain characters on the bodies of soldiers, fugitives, and of domestics, purposely to distinguish them.

There are three principal parts in this epistle. The first is the history of the vocation of St. Paul, chap. i. and ii.; the second is on justification and the abrogation of the law; the third is an exhortation to persevere in Christian liberty, to avoid its abuse, and to perform the various duties of a Christian.

Bible Text & Cross-references:

He exhorts to charity, humility, &c. He glories in nothing but in the cross of Christ.

1 Brethren, and if a man be overtaken in any fault, you who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens: and so ye shall fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every one prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another.

5 *For every one shall bear his own burden.

6 And let him who is instructed in the word, communicate to him, who instructeth him, in all good things.

7 Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

8 For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption: but he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting.

9 *And in doing good, let us not fail: for in due time we shall reap, not failing.

10 Therefore, whilst we have time, let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

11 See what a letter I have written to you with my own hand.

12 For whosoever desire to please in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer the persecution of the cross of Christ.

13 For neither they themselves, who are circumcised, keep the law: but they will have you to be circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

16 And whosoever shall follow this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me: for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body.

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

*

5: 1 Corinthians iii. 8.

9: 2 Thessalonians iii. 13.

Daily Bible study Series (non-Catholic)

BURDEN-BEARING

Galatians 6:1–5

Brothers, if a man is caught out in some moral slip-up, you whose lives are dominated by the Spirit must correct such a man with the spirit of gentleness, and, as you do it, you must think about yourselves, in case you too should be tempted. Carry one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For, if anyone thinks of himself as important while he is of no importance, he is deceiving himself with the fancies of his mind. Let every man test his own work, and then any ground of boasting that he has will be in regard to himself and not in comparison with others. For each man must carry his own pack.

PAUL knew the problems that arise in any Christian society. The best of men slip up. The word Paul uses (*paraptoma*) does not mean a deliberate sin; but a slip as might come to a man on an icy road or a dangerous path. Now, the danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others hardly. There is an element of hardness in many a good man. There are many good people to whom you could not go and sob out a story of failure and defeat; they would be bleaky unsympathetic. But Paul says that, if a man does make a slip, the real Christian duty is to get him on his feet again. The word he uses for *to correct* is used for executing a repair and also for the work of a surgeon in removing some growth from a man's body or in setting a broken limb. The whole atmosphere of the word lays the stress not on punishment but on cure; the correction is thought of not as a penalty but as an amendment. And Paul goes on to say that when we see a man fall into a fault we do well to say, "There but for the grace of God go I."

He goes on to rebuke conceit and gives a recipe whereby it may well be avoided. We are to compare our achievement not with the work of our neighbours but with what our best would have been. When we do that, there can never be any cause for conceit.

Twice in this passage Paul speaks about bearing burdens. There is a kind of burden which comes to a man from the chances and the changes of life; it is fulfilling the law of Christ to help everyone who has such a burden to carry. But there is also a burden which a man must bear himself. The word Paul uses is the word for a soldier's pack. There is a duty which none can do for us and a task for which we must be personally responsible.

KEEPING IT UP

Galatians 6:6–10

He who is being instructed in the word must share in all good things with him who is giving instruction. Don't deceive yourselves; no one can make a fool of God; whatever a man sows this he will also reap. He who sows to his own lower nature will from that nature reap a blighted harvest. He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap life eternal. Don't get tired of doing the fine thing, for, when the proper time comes, we will reap so long as we don't relax our efforts. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are members of the household of the faith.

HERE Paul becomes intensely practical.

The Christian Church had its teachers. In those days the Church was a really sharing institution. No Christian could bear to have too much while others had too little. So Paul says, "If a man is teaching you the eternal truths, the least you can do is share with him such material things as you possess."

He goes on to state a grim truth. He insists that life holds the scales with an even balance. If a man allows the lower side of his nature to dominate him, in the end he can expect nothing but a harvest of trouble. But if he keeps on walking the high way and doing the fine thing, in

the end God will repay.

Christianity never took the threat out of life. The Greeks believed in Nemesis; they believed that, when a man did a wrong thing, immediately Nemesis was on his trial and sooner or later caught up. All Greek tragedy is a sermon on the text, "The doer shall suffer." What we do not sufficiently remember is this—it is blessedly true that God can and does forgive men for their sins, but not even he can wipe out the consequence of sin. If a man sins against his body, soon or late he will pay in ruined health—even if he is forgiven. If a man sins against his loved ones, soon or late hearts will be broken—even if he is forgiven. John B. Gough, the great temperance orator, who had lived a reckless early life, used to declare in warning, "The scars remain." And Origen, the great Christian scholar and a universalist, believed that, although all men would be saved, even then the marks of sin would remain. We cannot trade on the forgiveness of God. There is a moral law in the universe. If a man breaks it he may be forgiven, but, nonetheless, he breaks it at his peril.

Paul finishes by reminding his friends that sometimes the duty of generosity may be irksome, but no man who ever cast his bread upon the waters found that it did not return some day to him.

THE CLOSING WORDS

Galatians 6:11–18

See in what large letters I am writing in my own handwriting. Those who wish to make a pretentious display from the merely human point of view are trying to compel you to get yourselves circumcised, but their real object is to avoid persecution because of the Cross of Christ. For those who advocate circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they wish you to get yourselves circumcised that they may boast about the way in which you are observing the outward and the human rituals. God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. To be circumcised is of no importance, and to be uncircumcised makes no difference. What does matter is to be re-created. May peace and mercy be upon all who shall walk by this standard and on the Israel of God. For the future, let no one trouble me for I bear the brands of Jesus in my body.

Brothers, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. So let it be.

ORDINARILY Paul added only his signature to the letter which the scribe wrote to his dictation; but in this case his heart is running over with such love and anxiety for the Galatians that he writes this whole last paragraph. "See," he says, "in what large letters I am writing in my own handwriting." The large letters may be due to three things. (a) This paragraph may be written large because of its importance, as if it were printed in heavy type. (b) It may be written large because Paul was unused to wielding a pen and it was the best that he could do. (c) It may be that Paul's eyes were weak, or that the blinding headache was on him, and all he could produce was the large sprawling handwriting of a man who can hardly see.

He comes back to the centre of the matter. Those who wanted the Galatians to get themselves circumcised did so for three reasons. (a) It would save them from persecution. The Romans recognized the Jewish religion and officially allowed Jews to practise it. Circumcision was the unanswerable mark of a Jew; and so these people saw in it a passport to safety should persecution arise. Circumcision would keep them safe from the hatred of the Jews and the law of Rome alike. (b) In the last analysis, by circumcision and by keeping the rules and regulations of the law, they were trying to put on a show that would win the approval

of God. Paul, however, was quite certain that nothing that man could do could win salvation; so once again, pointing them to the Cross, he summons them to cease trying to earn salvation and to trust to the grace which loved them like that. (c) Those who desired the Galatians to be circumcised did not themselves keep all the law. No man could. But they wanted to boast about the Galatians as their latest trophies. They wanted to glory in their power over people whom they had reduced to their own legalistic slavery. So Paul once again lays it down with all the intensity of which he is capable that circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter; what does matter is that act of faith in Christ which opens a new life to a man.

“I bear,” said Paul, “the brands of Jesus in my body.” There are two possible meanings of this. (a) The *stigmata* have always fascinated men. It is told of Francis of Assisi that once as he fasted on a lonely mountain top he seemed to see the love of God crucified on a Cross that stretched across the whole horizon and as he saw it a sword of grief and pity pierced his heart. Slowly the vision faded and Francis relaxed; and then, they say, he looked down and lo! the marks of the nails were in his hands and he bore them to the end of his days. Whether it is truth or legend we cannot tell, for there are more things in this world than our matter-of-fact philosophy dreams of; and some think that Paul had so really passed through an experience of crucifixion with his Lord that he, too, bore the print of the nails in his hands. (b) Often a master branded his slaves with a mark that showed them to be his. Most likely what Paul means is that the scars of the things he had suffered for Christ are the brands which show him to be Christ’s slave. In the end it is not his apostolic authority that he uses as a basis of appeal; it is the wounds he sustained for Christ’s sake. Like Mr Valiant-for-Truth Paul said, “My marks and scars I carry with me to be my witness to him who will now be my rewarder.”

After the storm and stress and intensity of the letter comes the peace of the benediction. Paul has argued and rebuked and cajoled but his last word is GRACE, for him the only word that really mattered.

The letters to the Galatians and Ephesians. 2000, c1976 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia

MacArthur New Testament Commentary (non-Catholic)

PICK HIM UP

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (6:1)

The first responsibility of a spiritual believer who seeks to restore a fallen brother is to help pick him up. When a person stumbles, his first need is to get up, and often he needs assistance in doing it. An integral part of church discipline, therefore, is helping a fallen brother get back on his feet spiritually and morally.

Even if a man is caught in any trespass, he deserves help and encouragement as well as rebuke. Caught may imply that the person was actually seen committing the trespass, indicating there was no doubt about his guilt. But the Greek verb (*prolambanō*) also allows for

the idea of the man's being caught by the trespass itself, as it were. That is the sense of the King James rendering, "overtaken in a fault," and seems appropriate in this context.

That interpretation is also supported by Paul's use of *paraptōma* (trespass), which has the basic idea of stumbling or falling. The man does not commit the sin with premeditation but rather fails to be on his guard or perhaps flirts with a temptation he thinks he can withstand. Or he simply tries to live his life in his own power and fails, producing a deed of the flesh instead of the fruit of the Spirit.

Responsibility for the discipline of those who stumble, as well as for those who commit more serious sins, rests on the shoulders of church members who are spiritual. Spiritual believers are those walking in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, who, by virtue of their spiritual strength, are responsible for those who are fleshly.

It should be noted that, whereas maturity is relative, depending on one's progression and growth, spirituality is an absolute reality that is unrelated to growth. At any point in the life of a Christian, from the moment of his salvation to his glorification, he is either spiritual, walking in the Spirit, or fleshly, walking in the deeds of the flesh. Maturity is the cumulative effect of the times of spirituality. But any believer, at any point in his growth toward Christlikeness, can be a spiritual believer who helps a sinful believer who has fallen to the flesh.

The spiritually and morally strong have a responsibility for the spiritually and morally weak. "We who are strong," Paul says, "ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). Spiritual believers are to "admonish the unruly encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men" (1 Thess. 5:14).

It is not that spiritual believers are to be suspicious and inquisitive. Those are hardly qualities of spirituality. But they will be sensitive to sin whenever and wherever it may appear within the Body and should be prepared to deal with it in the way God's Word prescribes.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery, they reminded Him that the law of Moses required that she be stoned to death. Instead of replying, Jesus bent down and began writing in the sand—perhaps listing sins of which those in the crowd were guilty. "When they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones." When Jesus then asked her if any of her accusers had stayed to condemn her, she replied, "'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go your way: From now on sin no more'" (John 8:3–11).

Jesus was not interested in destroying the woman but in helping her, and that should be the attitude of His followers toward other people, especially toward fellow believers.

Jesus' command "Do not judge lest you be judged" (Matt. 7:1) is often used by Christians to oppose discipline in the church and is sometimes quoted by outsiders in opposing the church's taking strong stands against certain evils. As the context makes clear, however (see vv. 3–5), Jesus was talking about a self-righteous, condemning person who acts as judge, passing sentence on others, since he sees only the best in himself and the worst in everyone else. If such a person confesses and is cleansed of his own sin, the Lord went on to say, he then is qualified to confront his brother with the purpose not to condemn but "to take the speck out of [his] brother's eye" (v. 5). He is then spiritual and has the right and even obligation to help his brother overcome a trespass.

James's similar warning about judging others is also often used to oppose discipline. But

again the context makes clear that in his saying, “Who are you who judge your neighbor?” James was not talking about helping a brother out of a sin but about judgmentally speaking condemnation “against a brother” (James 4:11–12). A Christian who “speaks against a brother” is proud, self-righteous, and cruel. He seeks only to exalt himself by pushing down others. A spiritual believer who humbly seeks to restore a sinning brother, however, is not speaking against him but serving him in the best possible way.

A pastor once commented, “I have often thought that if I ever fall into a *paraptōma* [trespass], I will pray that I don’t fall into the hands of those censorious, critical judges in the church. Let me fall into the hands of barkeepers, streetwalkers, or dope peddlers, because such church people would tear me apart with their long, wagging, gossipy tongues, cutting me to shreds.”

Only spiritual believers have the wisdom or the right to discipline fellow believers, just as only spiritual believers have the right to leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). Before God, in fact, they do not have the right not to discipline. They are commanded to restore such a one. When a church is committed to restoring fallen members, it is on its way to being pure and usable.

Katartizō (to restore) literally means to mend or repair and was sometimes used metaphorically of restoring harmony among quarreling factions in a dispute. It was also used of setting a broken bone or putting a dislocated limb back in place. That is the figure used by the writer of Hebrews in calling on believers to “strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:12–13).

Spiritual believers restore a fallen believer first of all by helping him recognize his trespass as a trespass. Until a person admits his sin, he cannot be helped out of it. Once he has done that, he must be encouraged to confess his sin before God and turn away from it in repentance, sincerely seeking God’s forgiveness.

Restoration of fallen brothers and sisters is always to be done in a spirit of gentleness, which is characteristic of those who walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). A Christian who is critical and judgmental as he attempts to help a fallen brother does not show the grace of Christ or help his brother, but instead stumbles himself.

After a church has exercised proper discipline, the members should “forgive and comfort” the one who has been disciplined, “lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:7). He should not be regarded “as an enemy, but [admonished] as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:15).

From the caution each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted, it is clear that even spiritual believers can stumble. They are made of the same stuff as those who have fallen. Because the exhortation looking to yourself is so vital, Paul uses a strong word (*skopeō*, to observe or consider) in the present tense, which emphasized a continual, diligent attentiveness to their own purity. They, too, could be tempted and even fall into the same sin for which they disciplined a brother.

The attitude of every Christian should always be the attitude of Jesus. And when a believer needs to help discipline a fallen brother, he should ask for a special portion of Christ’s love and gentleness. If the Father does not want even one of His own to be devastated (Matt. 18:14), and if “the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56), how much less do His followers have the right to be destructive rather than helpful?

HOLD HIM UP

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one shall bear his own load. (6:2–5)

The second responsibility of a spiritual believer who seeks to restore a fallen brother is to help hold him up once he is back on his feet. It is not enough simply to help him turn from his sin and then leave him alone. It is immediately after a spiritual victory that Satan often makes his severest attacks on God's children.

Christians are continually (present tense) to bear one another's burdens. Bear has the thought of carrying with endurance, and burdens is from *baros*, which refers to heavy loads that are difficult to lift and carry. Used metaphorically, as here, it represents any difficulty or problem a person has trouble coping with. In this context the reference suggests burdens that tempt a sinning believer to fall back into the trespass from which he has just been delivered. A persistent, oppressing temptation is one of the heaviest burdens a Christian can have.

To be freed from a sin is not always to be freed from its temptation. The spiritual believer who truly loves his brother and sincerely wants to restore him to a walk by the Spirit will continue to spend time with him and make himself available for counsel and encouragement. Prayer is the most powerful weapon believers have in conquering sin and opposing Satan, and nothing helps a brother carry his burdens as much as prayer for him and with him.

The brother who has been delivered from a trespass has an obligation to let his spiritual friends help him carry his burdens. It is not spirituality but pride that makes a person want to "go it alone." James tells believers to "confess [their] sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that [they] may be healed" (James 5:16). God Himself is the believer's ultimate source of strength, and on Him we are called to cast our burdens (Ps. 5:22) and our cares (1 Pet. 5:7). But He often uses fellow believers as His agents to help carry the burdens of His children.

Strong as he was in the Lord, Paul himself was not free from temptation or discouragement. He confessed that "when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more" (2 Cor. 7:5–7).

When believers bear one another's burdens, they fulfill the law of Christ. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). The law of Christ is the law of love, which fulfills all the rest of God's law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8, 10).

It is a misguided and unscriptural philosophy that causes some pastors to think they should not get too close to members of their congregation. Obviously they should never show favoritism, and there is danger in becoming too involved in superficial social relationships. But a pastor who does not intimately attend to the people under his care cannot possibly minister to them effectively.

For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, Paul continues, he deceives himself. At first glance that statement seems somewhat out of place. But in light of the call for

spiritual believers to restore sinning brothers “in a spirit of gentleness” (v. 1), the need for such a warning becomes apparent.

One of the chief reasons many Christians do not bother to help fellow Christians is that they feel superior to sinners and wrongly consider themselves to be spiritually something when the truth is they are really nothing. Like the Pharisees, their concern is not for the true righteousness that God gives and that comes only through humility (see Matt. 5:3–8) but for their own self-righteousness, which has no part in God’s kingdom or its work (v. 20). Their desire is not to help a stumbling brother but to judge and condemn him. At best, they leave him to “stew in his own juice,” thinking, if not saying, “He got himself into this mess; let him get himself out.”

Conceit can coexist with outward morality, but it cannot coexist with spirituality. In fact, conceit is the ultimate sin, first on the list of things God hates (Prov. 6:16–17). The Christian who thinks he is something when he is nothing needs help in facing his own sin before he can be qualified to help anyone else out of a sin. He needs first to “take the log out of [his] own eye” (Matt. 7:5). If he refuses to see his own spiritual need, he deceives himself and is useless in serving God or in helping fellow believers. The Greek verb behind deceives means “to lead one’s mind astray” and relates to subjective fantasies that are self-deceptive.

Therefore every Christian should examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. A believer’s first responsibility is to examine (from *dokimazō*, to approve after testing) himself, to be sure his own attitudes and life are right in the eyes of the Lord before he attempts to give spiritual help to others. Then, and only then, will he have reason for boasting in a proper way. If anything remains for boasting after honest self-examination, it will be that which induces boasting in the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12–18).

God does not grade on the curve but by His own absolutes. He does not compare believers to each other but to His divine, perfect standards of righteousness. And if the Lord does not judge a believer by comparing him with other believers, how much less should a believer judge himself in that way? (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12).

If there is reason for a believer’s boasting, or rejoicing, in regard to himself, that is, in regard to what God has done in and through him, it is on the basis of his faithfulness and obedience, not on the basis of what he may have accomplished in regard to, or compared to, another. If he is truly more faithful and useful than some of his fellow believers, that is God’s doing, not his own.

Paul’s command for each one to bear his own load seems to contradict what he has just said about bearing one another’s burdens (v. 2). But he uses a different term here. *Phortion* (load) refers to anything that is carried, and has no connotation of difficulty. It was often used of the general obligations of life that a person is responsible to bear on his own.

For a Christian, load can refer to “his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad,” for which he will give account “before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12–15). His load can also refer to fulfilling his personal calling and ministry for the Lord. Jesus assures His followers that the “load” [*phortion*] of service He gives them “is light” (Matt. 11:30). In either case, every believer is accountable to bear his own load, even the light one Christ gives him, and to answer for his faithfulness in so doing when he faces Him.

BUILD HIM UP

And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. (6:6)

The third responsibility of a spiritual believer who seeks to restore a fallen brother is to help build him up.

Like verse 3, this verse at first glance does not seem to fit into what Paul is focusing on in the passage. The seemingly obvious interpretation, and the one that is most common, is that Paul is exhorting congregations to pay their pastors fairly. But although that principle is taught in the New Testament (see, e.g., Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:7–14), it does not seem to be what Paul is teaching here. He has just been talking about restoring sinning brothers, and in verses 7–8 he talks about sowing and reaping in the flesh or by the Spirit. Not only that, but no mention is made of financial support or necessarily of any kind of material support. Good things could include material goods, but that does not seem to be the sense here.

The Greek can be translated, “Let him who receives instruction share with him who gives instruction in all good things,” and such a rendering seems appropriate.

Share is from *koinōneō*, which has the basic idea of sharing equally. It is the verb form of the noun commonly translated “fellowship.” Paul is talking about mutuality, not of one party serving or providing for the other but of both parties sharing together. The one who is taught the word and the one who teaches have a common fellowship and should share all good things together.

The most common term for material things that are favorable, or good, is *kalos*. But good things translates the plural of *agathos*, which is used in the New Testament primarily of spiritual and moral excellence. Paul uses this word in describing the gospel itself, the “glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:15). The writer of Hebrews uses it in the same way, of “the good things to come” of which “Christ appeared as a high priest” (Heb. 9:11) and of which the law was “only a shadow” (10:1).

Under this interpretation, the sharing of all good things is the third step in the restoration of a fallen believer. The spiritual Christian who has picked up and held up his fallen brother also builds him up in the word, in whose good things they fellowship together.

v. verse

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

MacArthur, J. 1996, c1987. *Galatians*. Includes indexes. Moody Press: Chicago