

*6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore him gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, <sup>5</sup> for each one should carry his own load. <sup>6</sup> Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature (flesh) will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Last week we looked at life by the Spirit, and what we should do to be Christlike. Paul states that if we live by the Spirit we will be keep in step with the Spirit. A life guided by Holy Spirit will be one that does the will of God in submission to Him. Now Paul is giving some practical advice to the Galatians.

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore him gently.*

All of us are saints who sin from time to time. Within the church today, most sins are pretty much hidden because we don't know what goes on in the lives of people when they're outside the church. What Paul is talking about is not about hardened sinners who refuse to change their ways or heretical beliefs, but those who find themselves in awkward situations when sin might appear be the easier way out in the case of telling lies or sin might be so tempting that the flesh yields – for example to the opportunity to steal or to allow oneself to be seduced. Older translations speak about “overtaken by sin” which implies being trapped by temptation. For example, an adulterer might be caught in or overtaken by sin. While the Jewish law of Moses demanded the death penalty for both the man and the woman, we see that Jesus tells the woman caught in adultery to sin no more. As we are forgiven for our sins by Jesus, so also should we forgive those who sin against us, and forgive those in the church who make mistakes and are found out. The judgmental attitude of legalists, those Jewish converts who insisted that the law of Moses remained the code of behaviour they followed, would include an unwillingness to forgive others while excusing themselves for their own shortcomings. That attitude can be found in those who profess to love the Lord Jesus but also love to condemn sinners and point the finger at those who fall from grace. Instead restoration of sinners overtaken by temptation is what the church should be doing.

*But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.* While we may be resisting temptation, temptation comes in many forms... some more resistible than others. For the overweight diabetic person, a barley sugar sweetie is a temptation that needs to be resisted, while for someone like me, a full fat high carbohydrate dinner with pudding full of cream and sugar doesn't even rate as a temptation that needs to be resisted. The seven deadly sins itemised by the early church (Tertullian of Carthage 155-220 AD) were pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth. Possibly pride has the most dangerous consequences for society, because it blots out seeing the existence of the other six sins. In the last few decades, the word pride has been perverted, just as the word gay no longer means happy and carefree. Envy is part and parcel of all the political ideologies that seek forcibly by law or revolution to redistribute wealth and deny opportunity for those who are envied in order to increase “fairness” and “equality”. As Christians we need to understand that the world under Satan's control wants to make sinful behaviour normal behaviour that doesn't need to be resisted. Entertainment often exhibits misbehaviour of every sort without any shame or guilt, and so normalises misbehaviour.

*<sup>2</sup> Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

The idea of being overtaken and laden by a heavy load of sin is expanded with a request: when we see fellow Christians overloaded, should we share the load? It is not an expectation on the part of the loaded down person that others should help them – the focus is on others who see someone needing help to do so lovingly. When we see someone in real need, it is up to us to respond in a way guided by Holy Spirit. It is not for the person overloaded either by sin or other troubles to expect help from the church members as a right because then he or she both lacks the faith that God will provide and lacks the humility to admit that the situation is of his or her own making. However, those who can help but refuse to do so because they believe themselves to be righteous and better than others are given a warning.

*<sup>3</sup> If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Not one of us should think himself better than others because there is no hierarchy of human beings created in the image of God. We all fall short of the glory of God and no sin is greater or lesser than any other sin in the eyes of a holy God who cannot bear the presence of any sin. So there are no grades of Christians, no Christian can claim he is a better Christian because he committed fewer sins than others he knows. That was the pharisaic attitude of the self-righteous man telling God he was better than the tax collector. Luke 18: 9-14 <sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ <sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Going on to verse 4

*<sup>4</sup> Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, <sup>5</sup> for each one should carry his own load.*

First some Greek... in verse 2 the word burden is used meaning heavy load, usually more than one man can carry, and here in verse 5 the word load commonly refers to a backpack or a much lighter load. Back to the text. We always need to examine our own motivation when we make decisions about others in the fellowship: do we help them or do we ignore their needs expecting someone else to deal with this? Being a disciple involves having responsibilities of our own and doing the best we can for ourselves, our families and our neighbours. It is a personal responsibility and cannot be shrugged off onto someone else when we do have the ability to deal with what needs to be done. Jesus tells each one of us to love our neighbours and we cannot outsource love to others. There are things we cannot handle and so if we can, we can give help those who can handle these tasks outside our own abilities or form a team to help. Each of us has a limited capacity for load carrying, and so we should be wise and seek Holy Spirit guidance as well as counsel from others when we know the load to be carried is beyond our personal capabilities.

*<sup>6</sup> Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.*

Passages like this are important yet can be awkward for the preacher. Martin Luther wrote, “These passages are all meant to benefit us ministers. I must say I do not find much pleasure in explaining these verses. I am made to appear as if I am speaking for my own benefit.” However those who teach deserve to be supported both financially and emotionally. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 9 on this subject, and I’ve never heard a sermon on this chapter!

*<sup>9</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me. <sup>4</sup> Don’t we have the right to food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles*

*and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living? <sup>7</sup> Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? <sup>8</sup> Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the Law of Moses: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain'. Is it about oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever ploughs and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? <sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. <sup>15</sup> But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. <sup>16</sup> For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.*

It is about sharing with your teacher. It is written in 1 Timothy 5:18 where Paul repeats that that a labourer is worthy of his hire, and those who labour doing the Lord's work are worthy of their wages.

Then Paul changes the subject slightly, but he is still speaking about those who follow Jesus compared to those who don't. He warns those who are ignoring God and indulging themselves in a sinful life, that there is a consequence.

*<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature (flesh) will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

"A man reaps what he sows" has become a common saying in the world, but the link with God cannot be mocked is usually ignored. To regard sharing in all good things with him who teaches as a waste is to mock God. It is selfishness that mocks God's generosity towards those who give to Him. Luther put it strongly: "Be careful, you scoffers. God may postpone His punishment for a time, but He will find you out in time, and punish you for despising His servants. You cannot laugh at God." Consequently we should honour those who preach the Gospel. Back to 1 Corinthians 9 <sup>11</sup> *If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? <sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?* The farmer who sows expects a harvest of many times more than the seed sown, and so also it should be with the one who sows the Word of God. What is more the sower of spiritual seed gets a reward of eternal life, while the sower of material seed gets a harvest of selfish sinful indulgence gets destruction.

*<sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

This exhortation to the Galatians is to continue to do good and not give up because they are tired, down hearted, or haven't had much of a harvest. Loving one's neighbour involves not just responding to needs, but actively meeting needs as the opportunity arrives to do good, especially in the fellowship. How can we bless each other? Paul is also saying how can you bless me given the struggles he has had?

Amen