

## PRIDE AND SELF-EXAMINATION



### Galatians 6:1-5

This Study Paper contains the following :-

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### Introduction to the passage

Paul has been urging the Galatian believers to live in a way that is filled with the Spirit (5:16-25). The evidence of Spirit-filled people is not some mystical experience in their life, but rather loving relationships with other people. Paul closes the previous chapter with an exhortation about not putting ourselves higher than we really are. As we begin the last chapter of the letter, Paul moves from the dangers of conceit (5:26) to the subject of humility and pride (6:1-5). Those who wanted to observe the law would themselves be in danger of falling into the sin of being spiritually proud. This is what Jesus had accused the Pharisees of. To help the Galatians understand this, Paul sets up a situation in which a Christian falls into a public but unspecified sin. Other believers would be shocked. In their hearts they would feel that they could never do something like that. A fellow-Christian sinning in such a way is hurtful to his fellow-believers. Such hurt can so easily lead to a superior and judgmental attitude. Some may want to be quick to move for action and church discipline. Paul is not so hasty. The fallen person needs to be restored whilst the spiritual pride of fellow-believing onlookers needs to be curtailed and dealt with.

### What these verses mean

Verse 1

**Brothers,**

The illustration that Paul sets before his readers is one that affects the Christian believing community. He is addressing Christians about a Christian problem, namely a fellow-believer is caught out by the wiles of the devil.

**if someone is caught in a sin,**

It is not clear whether the meaning is that some sin has overtaken a believer and caused him to be at fault, or whether one believer has discovered that a fellow believer is committing some sin. Probably the former meaning is intended. The Greek word means “to be caught before one realises” – the believer has not planned to commit the sin but has fallen into it without realising it could happen. The Greek word here translated “sin” means “a false step”. To commit (or fall into) such a sin is the opposite of “to walk in step with” of 5:25. It does not refer to a wilful, deliberate sin, but to an unexpected sudden mishap which will make the believer feel guilty of failure.

**you who are spiritual**

That is those in whose lives the fruit of the Spirit is seen (5:22,23). This should describe all professing Christian believers. Paul is not intimating that there are two classes of Christians, normal and super-spiritual. He is referring the reader back to the description of what a Christian’s attitude should be like. He could have said, “You who have trusted in Christ,” but he is emphasising his teaching that a person cannot claim to be a true Christian believer and not display the fruit of the Spirit. This will now be evident as Paul continues.

**should restore him gently.**

See 5:23. It is easy for some religious people harshly to condemn the faults of their fellow-believers. That is not the way of Christ. Evidence of true spirituality is a willingness to help with great sympathy those who stumble. The Greek word “to restore” is used of mending torn fishing nets or setting a broken bone. The idea of mending is more prominent than any idea of punishment; i.e. the aim of discipline is to restore the erring one to full church fellowship again.

**But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

In the first part of the verse “you” (plural) is used; now “you” (singular) is used. Each of the Spirit-led believers is to examine himself. See 1 Corinthians 10:12. He who truly examines himself will not become self-righteous when looking at others.

Verse 2

**Carry each other's burdens,**

The obligation to be helpful is for everyone to help each other. Paul is saying in effect, "This is the proper burden-bearing for Christians, not the bearing of the burden of the law of Moses (compare Acts 15:10), but the burden of being patient with fellow-believers' weaknesses."

**and in this way you will fulfil**

The Greek word is very emphatic: i.e. this kind of behaviour completely fulfils the law of Christ.

**the law of Christ.**

See John 13:34, 15:12; 1 John 4:21; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 5:14. Paul is saying, "If you must keep any law, let it not be the observance of ceremonies of the law of Moses but instead reproducing the quality of the life of Christ." See Focus Point in this study on "the law of Christ".

Verse 3

**If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.**

Anyone who becomes proud, thinking himself better than others, will not bear others' burdens. So pride causes him to break the law of Christ. The Judaisers would have been pressing upon the Galatians the importance of observing the law. This emphasises the works of man and encourages self-righteousness. The person who has put his total trust in Christ and knows that he cannot merit anything in God's eyes (through observing rules, ceremonies or doing good works), will realise that he is nothing and that all he possesses is in Christ. To think and behave in any other way is dangerous self-delusion.

Verse 4

**Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,**

As a remedy to self-importance Paul advises self-examination. As we do so we are not to evaluate our own behaviour by comparing ourselves to others whom we consider to be wrongdoers, such as the person in verse 1. If we do this then we are comparing ourselves to those whom we judge to be inferior, which will boost our own egos. That will do nothing to promote our own spiritual growth. We will find ourselves back in the list of the works of our sinful nature, which Paul sets out in 5:19-21. We are not to look at the sins of others but to put our own actions under the examination of the Bible. That will tell us of our spiritual quality. If our actions pass such a test then we can rejoice (take pride, boast) about it. If not then we have a lot to do to put our own life in order. We will then not have time to worry about the shortcomings of other fellow-believers.

Verse 5

**For each one should carry his own load.**

The word for "load" was often used by the Greeks for a ship's cargo, i.e. its own proper load, or for a soldier's pack, i.e. each man's own equipment. In verse 4 Paul has been saying that each believer is responsible for his own spiritual growth. In the day of judgment we will not be judged on how other believers have developed. Each believer will be judged on his own performance. This verse does not contradict verse 2. We are to help one another (verse 2) but we are responsible to see that we ourselves are what we ought to be (verse 5). This verse 5 prevents an abuse that could arise from verse 2. Some might make unjust demands on the generosity of others – "The law of Christ means you must help me." But if each believer conscientiously bears his own load, he will not be tempted to impose on the good nature of others.



## Summary

The Christian believer is to be different from a non-believing person. Behaviour and lifestyle will arise from the attitude a person has. For the Christian this will come from the effect and influence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. The Bible describes this attitude and lifestyle as the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is not writing these things as a theory but that all the parts of the fruit as described in 5:22-23 must be seen in action. The problem the Galatians were facing, through the false teachers, was self-righteousness. This is the work of the sinful nature and not the fruit of the Spirit. Paul then, having set out the difference, puts before the Galatians a scenario of a sinning believer. The fruit of the Spirit will respond differently in such a situation from the sinful nature. If his fellow-believers are truly spiritual, they will restore him with gentleness and humility. This does not always happen as the sin of pride rises so quickly and easily within the believer. The person may not readily realise that he is putting himself above the fallen believer. We are not to measure ourselves against others but against the standards set out in the Word of God. Only then will we truly know our spiritual condition. It is the responsibility of every Christian believer to evaluate his own life against the Bible. We are to carry our own load, for our spiritual development is our own responsibility and not that of others.



## A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

### Burden-bearing

1. **What it is: “restore him”**

If we see a fellow believer doing wrong, we are not to ignore it, nor to despise him. We are not to gossip about it. We are to try to raise the fallen one again. Compare Matthew 18:15-17.

2. **Who does it: “you who are spiritual”**

i.e. those of whom Galatians 5:16 and 22-25 is true. We may not excuse ourselves by saying, “I am not spiritual.” Every believer ought to be spiritual.

3. **How it is to be done: “gently ...or you also may be tempted”**

The related word “gentleness” occurs in 5:23. Evidently spiritual people are gentle. That gentleness arises from the knowledge of our own weaknesses. Only the spiritual have learned that of themselves.

To be a burden-bearer is a great ministry. It is something every Christian should be. Martin Luther, writing about these verses, said: “Christians must have strong shoulders and mighty bones.” i.e. they must be spiritually sturdy enough to bear the weaknesses of others.

Think of the examples in the life of Christ.



### Focus Point:

**“The law of Christ”** (Gal. 6:2)

Jesus, more than once, indicated that he was a law-giver: e.g. “whoever hears **my** sayings and does them” . . . “keep **my** commandments” . . . “take **my** yoke upon you” . . . “a new commandment **I** give you.”

Christian believers are not required to observe the laws and ceremonies of the Old Testament as their way of life (1 Tim. 1:9). But that does not mean that Christians can live carelessly or lawlessly. Paul says they are to be under “the law of Christ”. In another passage Paul describes himself as being “under the law to Christ” (1 Co. 9:21). “The law of Christ” does not ignore or cancel out the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Sinai. The commandments were part of Jesus’ teaching, e.g.

adultery, murder, divorce etc. (Matt. 5). So whilst the Christian does not have to keep to ritual or ceremony (outward), his behaviour and lifestyle is governed by the principles of the commandments, because they are incorporated into the law of Christ (internal).

The whole argument of Galatians is that believers are free from slavish adherence to the law of Moses. But what is meant by “the law of Christ”? How does that law differ from the law of Moses? Are believers freed from one law only to become slaves to another?

The law of Moses consisted of very many regulations on every aspect of daily life; there were detailed laws about food, clothing, hygiene, health, social life, family life, national life, economic life, religious life. Jews never had to think for themselves how to live. They had only to obey all the regulations meticulously.

Christian believers, however, have the Holy Spirit indwelling them (4:6) and no longer need the schoolmaster of the law to dictate how their lives should be (3:24-25) because the function of the law is to lead a person to Christ. For the Christian that has taken place and now he is led by the Spirit (5:18) and lives in the Spirit (5:25). But this does not mean that believers are to be guided in their lives only by some mystical, inward voice of the Spirit, to the neglect of all instruction from any other source.

The “law of Christ” is the authority of spiritual love (Rom. 5:5) controlling believers’ actions, causing them to be self-sacrificing for the benefit of others. Christ himself is the supreme example of the kind of life that is produced by living under the control of this law of love. The Holy Spirit continually reminds believers of the example of Christ’s life and so constrains them to govern their behaviour by the same principles. To live by the law of Christ is to properly understand the rule of the words of God (Ex. 20) through to the example of the Word of God i.e. Christ (John 1). Christ said that he had come to fulfil the law, not to abolish it (Matt. 5:17). The law God gave to the Israelites has not changed its requirements. It was only partially understood and the tendency was to interpret it in its outward form. With the coming of Christ, the full meaning of the law was revealed to us, showing that the law of Moses is moral and ethical. However, without personal faith in Christ’s death and sacrifice, complying with the law’s requirements is impossible. It is only Christ’s sin offering and the Spirit’s help that makes such things possible in God’s sight. (See Romans 8:4.)

The Old Testament Jews had no need to work out a pattern for their lives – the law of Moses dictated every detail of their lives for them. They lived like children under a schoolmaster (3:24)! Christians, however, are

expected to work out for themselves the pattern of their lives by the urging of the Spirit and from the example of Christ. That is living under the law of Christ. It involves the believer in

- (i) responsibility, to think about every action, and
- (ii) spirituality, to think in a Christlike way about everything.

This is a mature way of life, unlike the childish way of life in the Old Testament (4:1,2) where every action was dictated by rules.

One interesting result of living “under the law of Christ” is that sometimes believers may appear to act inconsistently with what has been done at other times, i.e. the believer may not always act in the same way in different situations (1 Co. 9:20-22). The expression of self-sacrificing love may take one form in one situation but another form in another situation. But always the same motive is present: the law of love.



## Over to you

Think back to when a believer in your church may have fallen into sin. In what spirit was the matter dealt with? Would you deal with it differently now?

Does your preaching and teaching deal with the standards that God sets for his people? If not, how do you propose to remedy the situation? How do you expect your congregants to check their spiritual condition?

How would you, in your situation, encourage your people to help each other by carrying each other's burdens and at the same time to take responsibility for carrying their own load?