

LESSON 13: "Dealing with Sin"

Date: December 14, 2014

TEXT: Galatians 6:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Illustration: "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!'"¹

William Booth understood Christian freedom—he recognized that it was an opportunity, not for fleshly indulgence, but for mutual loving service (Galatians 5:13).² But to what degree does that extend? What happens when a fellow brother does use his liberty in a fleshly way? What happens when a fellow Christian gets ensnared in a sinful habit? How far does the bondage of mutual love go in those situations? How does it express itself in those contexts?

Well, since Christian freedom is not about me, but others, then its fruit of Spirit-filled ministry is service to its brothers and sisters even when they are gravely straying. In other words, we are our brother's keeper!

Continuing and even specifically applying the principles of Galatians 5:13-26, Paul deals now with this topic of erring brothers and sisters and puts it squarely in the realm of local church ministry. This is evident by the addressing of "brothers" in verse 1, the continued reference to "one another" ministry in verse 2 (cf. 5:13, 15, 26), the use of the Greek verb *koinoneo* (i.e., share, participate, fellowship, partner) in verse 6, and the reference to "the household of faith" in verse 10.

In this passage, Paul's message is clear—**as an individual and as a local church, we must deal seriously with sin, or sin will deal seriously with us.** That message reveals to us both a spiritual responsibility and some compelling reasons.

THE RESPONSIBILITY: DEAL SERIOUSLY WITH SIN (vv. 1-6)

Paul provides instruction about this responsibility in three parts.

1. Instruction about the process (vv. 1-2)

a. Situation (v. 1a)

The first phrase of verse 1 gives us the situation: "if anyone is caught in any transgression."

The word "anyone" is singular and non-specific; it refers to anyone in the local church. The word "caught" may mean either: (1) "caught in a sin" with an emphasis on being discovered, or (2) "caught [or overtaken] by a sin" with an emphasis on the suddenness and surprise of it (cf. 1:6). While both interpretations are argued for, we'll go with the first one, for as Kent says, "Strictly speaking, one can be overtaken by temptation but not by transgression...for that requires an act of the individual."³ So, it would seem that this sin is not a mere stumble, but something that has become life-dominating, which is the kind of transgression that is going to be more readily apparent to the public.



From the context, what might some of these "any transgressions" be?

Some will suggest that it refers to the legalism of those who were troubling (cf. 1:7; 5:10, singular like "anyone" here in 6:1) and bewitching (cf. 3:1, also singular) these Galatian Christians; however, Paul already suggested what should be done with those legalistic Judaizers in 4:30 and 5:1, 12—they should be removed!

Therefore, in light of the more immediate context, the "transgressions" that Paul has in mind are the "works of the flesh" referenced in 5:19-21—REVIEW this list, which can be divided into these categories: moral sins ("sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality"), worship sins ("idolatry, sorcery"), relational sins ("enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy"), societal sins ("drunkenness, orgies"), and many more ("things like these"). All of these sins, when dominating and discovered in the life of a professing Christian, must be dealt with!



What does Galatians 1:6 indicate concerning the timeline of dominating and destructive sins?

While such sins often increase their strength and domination over time, other sins can trouble and entrap “so quickly.” Therefore, the interpretation that we discarded earlier (i.e., that this individual is suddenly and surprisingly “overtaken by a sin”) is a real possibility, and we must be on guard!

So, the situation is that someone is “caught” in a particular sin—this sin has come to dominate them to the point where it is easily discovered by those watching and interacting with them.

b. Resolution (v. 1b)

The second phrase of verse 1 gives us the resolution: “you who are spiritual restore such a person.”



From the context, who are these “spiritual” ones that are qualified and called upon to restore erring brothers and sisters in the church?

These “spiritual ones” are those who are walking by the Spirit and therefore not indulging their flesh, but lovingly serving one another (5:16, 24-25). They are being led by the Spirit and therefore producing His fruit (5:18, 22-23).

The word “spiritual” is plural (whereas the one who had sinned was singular), which again stresses the need for the local church community to be active in each others’ lives!

Regarding the description, “spiritual,” MacArthur writes:

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.⁴

Paul “is not referring to some super-spiritual group of elite Christians; he is saying to ordinary Christians: *If you follow the desires of the Spirit, you will do this.* The responsibility belongs to anyone who is trying to live a Christian life.”⁵ In other words, this is part of the fruit of the Spirit—in fact, it is the fruit of goodness (cf. 6:6, 9, 10), which as Pastor Ben defined it for us last year is “moral and spiritual excellence of life that afflicts the comfortably apathetic and comforts the afflicted around us.”

Therefore, while I might be “spiritual” right now and in a position (and responsibility) to restore an erring brother or sister, I may not be in such a position tomorrow. If tomorrow I chose to walk according to the flesh, then I will be in need of my “spiritual” brothers and sisters to restore me.


The word “restore” means “to cause to be in a condition to function well: put in order, restore.”⁶ It is used in secular Greek to refer to the setting of bones in order to heal (cf. Hebrews 12:12-13) and in the New Testament to refer to the mending of nets (Matthew 4:12). It carries the idea of making something “fit” or “suitable” for its purpose again. God’s goal for His erring children is always restoration, and it should be our goal for each other, too!


For a follower of Jesus, his/her purpose is to glorify God by being an obedient disciple and by making other disciples. God’s Word becomes indispensable for him, both as his standard for personal Jesus-honoring obedience and for his message of good news to would-be disciples. With that in mind, notice from Galatians 6:6 that the resource used by the “spiritual” ones in their loving and gentle confrontation of erring brothers and sisters is “the Word.” We cannot restore people unless we know and use the Word!



In contrast to our society’s insistence on professional development and secular training as necessary qualifications for counseling ministry (i.e., psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists), what does Romans 15:14 teach to be the two characteristics that convinced (the meaning of “satisfied”) Paul that one was “able to instruct” (lit. admonish/counsel) other people?

In Romans 15:14, the two characteristics that “convinced” Paul that one was qualified to admonish or counsel others were kindness (“full of goodness”) and knowledge (“filled with all knowledge”).

 *What do these passages contribute to a Christian’s understanding of an appropriate resolution for those “caught in a transgression”—2 Corinthians 2:7; 13:11; James 5:19-20; Jude 22-23? Discuss.*

 *From the following passages, what is the legalist’s resolution for a sinner “caught in a transgression”—John 8:3-5; Acts 21:27-31? Arrogant and angry judgment*

c. *Disposition (vv. 1c-2)*

The end of verse 1 and verse 2 give us the appropriate disposition for our correction. It is not enough to merely confront and restore; it must be done with the right spirit. Paul says, “...in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

- ***Personally*** — Paul tells us that we should have a right attitude about ourselves (i.e., “yourself”): an attitude of careful watchfulness. The word for “keep watch” can be translated “paying careful attention to” (cf. the use of this word in Philippians 3:17 [positive] and Romans 16:17 [negative]; cf. synonym in Mark 4:24) and is the same root word as “spy” in Galatians 2:4. Louw and Nida define the word this way: “to be ready to learn about future dangers or needs, with the implication of preparedness to respond appropriately.”⁷ So, in the hour of confrontation, the spiritual individual will be tender as to his own spiritual frailness and potential failure.
- ***Mutually*** — When it comes to our disposition towards “one another,” Paul first says that confrontation should be done “in a spirit of gentleness.” “Gentleness” is a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:23) and a must for the servant of the Lord (2 Timothy 2:25). It is the quality of humble, meek, considerate interest in others. In correction and restoration, one

seasoned pastor advised a younger pastor that it is practically portrayed by communicating in three ways: “slower, softer, shorter.”

Paul adds secondly that we must “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Partnering with others in bearing their burdens is a regular admonition to Christians in the New testament. Romans 15:1 says, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, “We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

A “burden” is “someth. that is particularly oppressive.”⁸ In the context, it has immediate reference to “sinful conduct and its consequences resulting in trouble and sorrow.”⁹ So, “bearing a burden” is not merely patting someone on the back who scored lower than they wanted to on an exam; it’s not simply helping a needy sister out with yard work on a Saturday morning—in the context, it foremost has to do with the burden of sin. We are supposed to partner with people in their moral weakness, their emotional fragility, their spiritual struggles, their various temptations, their discouraging failures, their besetting trials, and their needed accountability. This is what the author of Hebrews refers to when he says in Hebrews 3:12-13, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” He again reiterated the same admonition in Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” James also picks up this theme when he writes in James 5:16, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” This is the kind of burden that Peter was failing under in Galatians 2:10ff and that Paul helped him bear.


By the way, you know you are “bearing” someone else’s burden when you feel its weight. Tim Keller explains:

*You cannot help with a burden unless you come very close to the burdened person, standing virtually in their shoes, and putting your own strength under the burden so its weight is distributed on both of you, lightening the load of the other. So in the same way, a Christian must listen and understand, and physically, emotionally, spiritually, take up some of the burden with the other person.*¹⁰

Oh how this contrasts with often-thought, sometimes-spoken sentiments like, ““He got himself into this mess; let him get himself out”!


In the phrase, “and so fulfill the law of Christ,” Paul alludes back to Galatians 5:14 in which he taught, “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Christian love is not an emotion as much as it is sacrificial service—it actually is bearing others’ burdens! This is what John meant when he instructed us to love “in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). When we “bear one another’s burdens,” it is an expression of true love, and it satisfies the very essence of the ethical/moral will of Christ.

John, the disciple of Jesus, writes about such Christlike love in 1 John 4:21, “This commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” He is undoubtedly referencing what Jesus Himself said in John 13:34—“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”

 *What was “new” about this commandment, since it was actually an old commandment (cf. Leviticus 19:18), and how does that enrich our understanding of this responsibility?*

Jesus’ command was “new” in that we are commanded to love our neighbor “as Christ loved us” (cf. Ephesians 4:32). Therefore, love is the law of Christ, not only in that it is what He commands and wills, but also that it is what He

Himself perfectly demonstrated to us (cf. Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9-11, 19)! Keller concludes, “Verse 2 could be summed up as: *Bear others’ burdens, and by so doing this follow in the footsteps of Christ, who bore yours.*”¹¹ Jesus Christ bore the burden of our sin (cf. Isaiah 53), and so we should bear with others the burden of their temptations and failures.

 *How does this “burden” of mutual burden contrast with the Mosaic Law?*

We saw in Galatians 5:13-14 that while “bondage” to the Mosaic Law could never fulfill God’s moral will, the “bondage” of mutual love can and does! Similarly here, the “burden” of the Mosaic Law could never accomplish God’s will (cf. Acts 15:10, 28), but the “burden” of mutual concern does (cf. Matthew 11:30)!

So, concerning the process, here are God’s instructions—when a professing Christian in the local assembly is being dominated by a fleshly sin that is discovered by those around him, then those fellow-Christians who are submitted to the leadership and fruitfulness of the Spirit should lovingly, gently, and carefully come alongside that individual and work to restore him to spiritual health.

2. *Instruction for the people correcting (vv. 3-5)*

In verses 3-5, Paul addresses those who would bear each others’ burdens in the church and work to restore those who are sinning. He has already stated that they need to “keep watch on [themselves],” and now he fleshes out that instruction.

a. *Proper evaluation (v. 3)*

Verse 3 says, “For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” When it comes to the presence of sin and the need to deal with it in the local church, it is paramount that we properly evaluate ourselves. MacArthur observes, “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.”¹²

It should be clear at this point in the epistle that the self-righteous have no part in the work of Christ. God hates their pride (Proverbs 6:16-17) and unveils their self-deception (1 Corinthians 3:18). The failure to properly evaluate oneself as being similarly weak and “prone to wander” has caused many would-be correctors to themselves be in need of serious correction (Proverbs 16:18).

b. Private examination (v. 4)

Paul builds on his first point of instruction by exhorting in verse 4, “Let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.” Echoing his admonition against comparing ourselves with one another in 2 Corinthians 10:12, Paul tells the would-be corrector to examine himself first! Before he attempts to remove any speck from someone else’s eye, he better make sure he doesn’t have a log in his own (Matthew 7:1-5)! Only when a Christian has made private examination will he be in an appropriate position to “boast.” MacArthur explains this appropriate boasting:

*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.*¹³

So rather than finding his arrogant confidence in what he has been able to accomplish in the lives of those around him (cf. Galatians 5:26), the truly spiritual individual rejoices primarily “in himself alone”—that is, in what God has been accomplishing within His own life (cf. Galatians 5:13-25).

c. Personal experience (v. 5)

Paul’s final instruction to the spiritual individual is about his personal experience. Paul writes, “For each will have to bear his own load.” Using a different word than “burden” in verse 2 (which connoted a great amount of difficulty), Paul reminds us that we all have our own “load” (like a backpack) that we need

to be carrying. One lexicon interprets the meaning of this word in this context this way: “the burden of one’s own responsibilities and failures” (cf. Psalm 38:4).¹⁴ In other words, we shouldn’t think ourselves above helping someone with their burden, because we have one, too! And we will give an account for it. John Stott writes, “There is one burden which we cannot share...and that is our responsibility to God on the day of judgment. On that day you cannot carry my pack and I cannot carry yours.”¹⁵

3. Instruction for the people being corrected (v. 6)

“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; 1 Timothy 5:17-18), it does not seem to be what Paul is teaching here.”¹⁶ In light of the fact that a financial injunction seems out of place in this context, we’ll take a broader, more general interpretation.

Literally translated, verse 6 reads, “The one who is being taught the Word must share with the one who is teaching in all good things.” The word “share” is the Greek verb “koinoneo” which refers to the unique community/fellowship/partnership that believers share together (cf. 1 John 1:3). “In Christ,” believers share “all good things” that He has provided (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-30, 32). The corrected brother or sister should be careful to enjoy and maintain this unique relationship with those who have so lovingly and selflessly ministered to them.

I have discovered from personal experience that many whom I would graciously and carefully correct would rather disassociate entirely from their local church than humbly and repentantly preserve its fellowship. That is exactly the response Paul is writing against in verse 6, and it is a terribly response on the part of the one being corrected. Disassociating yourself from your Christian community is like a fish out of water, and there will be no help when the problem intensifies and the crisis comes.

THE REASONS: SIN WILL DEAL SERIOUSLY WITH YOU (vv. 7-10)

Paul uses contrast to drive home these reasons. First, he deals with the consequences of failing to seriously deal with your sin. Second, he demonstrates the alternative.

1. *Consequences (vv. 7-8a)*

Paul highlights three consequences when we fail to deal seriously with sin—individually or corporately.

a. *Self-deception (v. 7a)*

“The strongest implication of Paul’s warning in Galatians 6:7 seems to be that misled believers were deceiving themselves. As Jeremiah warns, ‘The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick’ (Jer. 17:9; cf. Obad. 3). ‘Therefore, just because you are saved,’ Paul was essentially saying, ‘don’t think you can sin with impunity. You are terribly deceived if you think that God does not deal severely with sin in the lives of His children.’”¹⁷ This applies both to the believing individual (cf. Hebrews 12:5-11; James 1:13-16) and the Christian church (cf. Revelation 2:1-7; 3:14-22).

b. *Divine mockery (v. 7b)*

“The second consequence is by far the worse, because it amounts to treating the Lord with contempt. Mocked is from *muktērizō*, which literally means to turn up one’s nose, and therefore to scorn or sneer. John declares that for a Christian to deny his sin is to make God a liar (1 John 1:10) and to mock His absolute holiness.”¹⁸ Such divine mockery is referenced again in 2 Peter 2:1-2, and Paul shows in Titus 2:5, 8, 10 how it can be avoided with godly, gospel-living.

c. *Fleshly corruption (vv. 7c-8a)*

Paul writes, “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.”

Illustration: This law of cause and effect is widely observed, and it is just as certain in the moral and spiritual realms.

Consider some of the specifics of this law:

- ***You reap the same kind as you sow.*** — Sowing to the flesh will never reap anything but destructive fleshliness.
- ***You reap in a different season than when you sow.*** — If you aren’t experiencing the negative effects of fleshly indulgence, you will!

2. *Alternative: “sow to the Spirit” (vv. 8b-10)*

The alternative is succinctly stated at the end of verse 8—“the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” As individual Christians and as a church, we can avoid the tragic consequences of belittling our sin by making much of Spirit-filled living. Holiness is a harvest, and the holy Christian and holy church will cultivate their spiritual vitality in the following ways.

a. *Diligently (v. 9a)*

They do “not grow weary of doing good”; they “do not give up.”

Application: Individually, this looks like believers who don’t stop fighting sin, even when it is severely difficult (cf. 1 Peter 5:8-10; 2 Peter 1:5-11). Corporately, it looks like a local church that is proactive in keeping one another accountable and encouraged (cf. Hebrews 10:24-25).

b. *Expectantly (v. 9b)*

They are confident that “in due season [they] will reap.”

Application: Individually, a believer will reap personal godliness and “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). This fruit may be Christlike character and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), effective service for the Lord, God-honoring worship, or evangelistic blessing. Corporately, a local church will reap a God-glorifying harvest of fruit in its Great Commission mandate of evangelism and discipleship.

c. Regularly (v. 10a)

They do good to everyone, “as [they] have opportunity.” Life is that opportunity. Yes, it is good for us to remember that “life is ministry, and ministry is people, and people take time.”

Application: When asked, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), Jesus essentially turned the question into, “To whom should I be a neighbor today?” (Luke 10:30-37). The answer is that we should be a loving neighbor to anyone around us who has a need (cf. Philippians 2:1-4).

d. Beneficially (v. 10b)

They “do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Application: Again, in the context, this doing of “good” is related to showing to the Spirit (individually or mutually) and not to the flesh. Remember our definition of goodness? It is “moral and spiritual excellence of life that afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted around us.” So, this is more than merely mowing the neighbor’s lawn, participating in the church workday, preparing a meal for a family in the church, etc. It also includes those personal and partnering choices and actions that will cultivate moral and spiritual excellence in ourselves and others.

When it comes to the seriousness of dealing with sin, “the best defense is a good offense.” If we are proactive in “walking in the Spirit,” “being led by the Spirit,” and “sowing to the Spirit,” then we are sowing seed that will bring forth the “fruit of the Spirit” and the “fruits of righteousness” (cf. Philippians 1:11; Hebrews 12:11; James 3:18).

Application: In one of his books, Joshua Harris references and then applies this passage this way:

*Do you know why some Christians make great strides in their walk with God while others are stagnant? Have you ever wondered if there is a godliness gene that some people are born with? Of course there isn’t. The difference between the person who grows in holiness and the one who doesn’t is not a matter of personality, upbringing, or gifting; the difference is what each has planted into the soil of his or her heart and soul.*¹⁹

If we want ourselves, our home, and our church to deal seriously with sin so that we might know the satisfaction of the Spirit’s fruitful harvest, then we must stop sowing to the flesh and start sowing to the Spirit—diligently, expectantly, regularly, and beneficially.



Very practically, how can we sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life, as an individual, a family, a church? Discuss—it’s not rocket science!

- Take time to read and study (and obey) Scripture daily—individually and as a family.
- Gather with fellow believers in your local church to worship and be instructed by God’s Word.
- Serve in your local church.
- Seek God in prayer.
- Talk with a Christian friend about God’s character and faithfulness.
- Memorize passages of God’s Word and meditate on His promises.
- Read a Christian book that encourages you to love God and serve others more.
- Listen to a Christian song that strengthens your faith.
- Etc.

CONCLUSION

“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

ENDNOTES

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 721.

² Review: whatever you may think Christian freedom means, if your primary application of it is personal, then you don't really understand Christian freedom. According to God's Word and Jesus' example, Christian freedom should be primarily applied to others.

³ Homer Kent Jr., *The Freedom of God's Sons: Studies in Galatians* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1976), 168.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 177.

⁵ Tim Keller, *Galatians For You* (UK: The Good Book Company, 2013), 166-167.

⁶ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 526.

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 332.

⁸ Arndt, 167.

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ Keller, 168.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹² MacArthur, 181.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Zodhiates.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 159–160.

¹⁶ MacArthur, 182.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Joshua Harris, *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2003), 163. The list is adapted from page 165 of this same resource.