

Helping Others Walk by the Spirit

Scripture: Galatians 6:1–6

Code: 90-35

INTRODUCTION

All Christians experience times when their Christian walk is in the flesh and not in the Spirit. Even though we know about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's power, and exhortations to walk in the Spirit, we all fail at various times. The Spirit is sufficient, but because we live in unredeemed flesh, we occasionally become fleshly. When that happens we can expect those who are walking in the Spirit to respond biblically by confronting us. Likewise when we are walking in the Spirit we have the responsibility to help restore fleshly Christians by confronting them.

The Christian life cannot be lived individually. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together." The spiritual people within the church are to come alongside the fleshly and lift them up.

Christians are either one of two things at any one time: we are either spiritual or fleshly. We're spiritual when we obey will and Word of God, are sensitive to the Spirit, and are moved along by the Spirit because sin is confessed and He's controlling our lives. We're fleshly when we're running our own lives in disobedience to the Lord. A person who's been a Christian five minutes is spiritual if he's walking in the Spirit. A person whose been a Christian sixty years is fleshly if he's not obeying the Word of God and not walking in the Spirit. Spiritual growth occurs when we're walking in the Spirit.

LESSON

I. THE PROBLEM

A. The Reality of Sinfulness

Galatians 6 explains how we help one another be spiritual. It is applicable to all Christians because all Christians sin.

1. James 3:2--"We all stumble in many ways."
2. 1 John 1:8--"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us."
3. 1 John 1:10--"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar, and His word is not in us."

B. The Remedy to Sinfulness

1. Personal implications

There is always a remedial ministry occurring in the Body of Christ--the spiritual calling the fleshly to live on the spiritual level. It is essential because a fleshly Christian is useless to God and can be harmful.

a. 2 Timothy 2:20-21--"In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." Christians are to be cleansed. If you're using human means to solve spiritual problems, you're functioning in the flesh and are useless.

b. 1 Corinthians 5:6--"A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." If there's sin in a believer's life it has a negative impact throughout the Body of Christ. We must therefore be sensitive to both our own sin and that of others. Only in that way will the whole church be strong. We have the responsibility to walk by the Spirit ourselves so that we may stimulate that walk in others.

2. Corporate implications

The most important pursuit of the believer is personal holiness. That is true from both a personal and corporate standpoint. I can't deal with your problems unless I've dealt with mine first (cf. Matt. 7:1-5). Corporate ministry requires individual purity.

a. In spiritual gifts

We minister to each other by using our spiritual gifts, divine enablements by which the Spirit of God ministers through us to the Body of Christ. If we operate on a fleshly level, the spiritual gifts given to each of us won't function properly.

b. In mutual support

All believers are called to pray for, comfort, encourage, exhort, love, and teach one another (Col. 3:12-16). For those qualities and attitudes to be functional in our lives, we must be drawing on spiritual resources.

C. The Responsibility for Sinlessness

We have a responsibility to deal with one another in regard to sin. It would be nice if we could walk in the Spirit by ourselves. That way we wouldn't need any encouragement, help, or reproof. But we do need one another. I remember someone's saying to me awhile back, "I want to keep my life right before God for two reasons: so that God will use me to confront and help others in sin, and so that no one will be obliged to confront me." The ministry of restoration is self-purging. If a church does not engage in that kind of ministry, it is in effect removing a great motive for holy living.

1. 1 Corinthians 5:6-7--Paul said, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened." The church must cleanse itself. It cannot allow itself to tolerate sin among its people. The testimony of the church and the joy and effectiveness of its people are at stake.

2. 2 Thessalonians 3:6--"We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." When someone has been confronted and has refused to repent of his sin, we

must stay away from him. Otherwise that person will have a negative effect on the entire church body.

3. 1 Timothy 5:20--Elders "who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning." Men in spiritual leadership have a great responsibility to maintain the purity of the church.

4. Titus 2:15--"These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Because God wants a pure people who are zealous for good deeds, the Church must confront sin in whatever form it takes.

5. Titus 3:10-11--"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."

II. THE SOLUTION

Since each Christian is either spiritual or fleshly at any one time, it is safe to assume that a portion of the church is fleshly at any one time. Those who are walking by the Spirit are to help those who are fleshly. Otherwise the fleshly are cut off from the perfecting work of God in their lives. The responsibility of the spiritual to the fleshly does not apply to scandalous sin alone: it is a very broad responsibility.

A. Pick Them Up (v. 1)

"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."

Spiritual Christians have a responsibility to pick up the fleshly from their sin.

1. Whom do we help?

That responsibility is exercised within the church. The term "brethren" (v. 1) refers to Christians. The restoration Paul called for is of those within the church.

2. What prompts our helping?

Paul said that "any" trespass is to be the subject of confrontation. "Caught" (Gk., *prolambano* [prolambano]) means "trapped," "bound by" or "in bondage to." "Trespass" (Gk., *paraptoma* [paraptoma]) carries the idea of a fall or stumbling into sin. So when a believer falls and is caught in sin, the spiritual are to act.

3. What prevents us from helping?

American culture can make it difficult to know what is going on in the lives of other believers. Often we don't get close enough to people to see the way they live. But when you do know that a brother or sister in Christ is caught in sin, then you have to go into action. That is a mandate for the church.

We begin in and are perfected by the Spirit. However we can easily fall to the fleshly level, and when we do we're not always able to get back up on our own. We need other Christians to stimulate us again to love and good works. So the church must function as more than a Sunday morning meeting where we stare at the back of other people's heads. There must be an actual confrontation of lives.

4. Who may help?

Paul said that if a person is caught in any sin, "you who are spiritual, restore such a one" (v. 1). Those are people who have begun in the Spirit and are being perfected by Him. They are continually responding to the Spirit's ministry in their lives. They think spiritual thoughts and the Word of Christ dwells in them richly. Paul didn't say they are perfect. But those who are confessing their sin faithfully, obeying the Word of God, and seeking the Spirit's leading through prayer are obligated to help restore brothers and sisters in Christ who are caught in sin. This is how Scripture describes those who are spiritual.

- a. Galatians 5:25--"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."
- b. Galatians 5:18--"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."
- c. Galatians 5:22-23--"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." You are spiritual if those qualities are evident in your life.
- d. Ephesians 5:18-19--"Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Spirit-filled people are characterized by joy, praise, and worship.
- e. Ephesians 5:22-6:9--Spirit-filled husbands love their wives as Christ sacrificially loved the church (5:25-33). Spirit-filled wives will submit themselves to their husbands (5:22-24, 33). Spirit-filled parents will not provoke their children (6:4). Spirit-filled children will obey their parents (6:1-3). Spirit-filled employers will be kind to those who work for them (6:9). Spirit-filled employees will serve from the heart--as if their employers were Christ Himself (6:5-8).

A Spirit-filled life can be seen. Mere feeling is not sufficient evidence of a Spirit-filled life. You know you're walking by the Spirit when you see what's happening in your life. If you are walking by the Spirit you will experience the fruit of the Spirit. If there's a lack of love, joy, peace of heart, kindness, faithfulness to God, gentleness, and self-control in your life, then you're not walking by the Spirit. Keep in mind it is not perfection that is required, but a general pattern of life. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." These are the characteristics of a Spirit-filled believer. If you are Spirit-filled, you love God's Word and want to apply it. You want to commune with God because the Spirit in your heart cries, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6).

How Long Does It Last?

You may find that you go from being Spirit-filled to being fleshly very quickly. Have you ever finished your devotions in the morning and five minutes after you've prayed and read your Bible you're yelling at the kids? That's how fast you can go from one state to the other. Did you ever go to a Bible study, spend three hours studying the deep things of God, and then get out in the car and argue with your husband all the way home? We flip that fast. That's how strong the flesh is.

It's tempting to focus on ourselves and not get involved with anyone else. But Paul said, "Brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men" (1 Thes. 5:14). In the church, the strong help the weak. It is the responsibility of the spiritual to help the fleshly.

5. What procedure will help?

The spiritual will help the fleshly only when they "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1). The verb *katartizo* [katartizo] ("to restore") means "to mend" or "repair." The spiritual walk of the fleshly is in disrepair, and the spiritual are called to come along and help repair it.

a. In private

In Matthew 18 our Lord speaks about life in the church (He used the word "church" in verse 17). In verse 15 Jesus says that "if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private." In Galatians 6:1 Paul expressed a principle he had probably learned from Matthew 18. Some versions of Matthew 18:15 say, "if your brother sins against thee" (emphasis added), but that phrasing does not appear in the some manuscripts. You're to confront any kind of sin you're aware of. And that confrontation is to occur "in private" (Matt. 18:15).

Part of the process of confrontation is to help the fleshly person see sin as sin. Many times people will justify their sin by comparing themselves with others. We can be very self-justifying. Once the person acknowledges his sin, he needs to confess it to God, seeking His forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome future temptation.

b. In public

1) In the presence of witnesses

Matthew 18:16 says, "If he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." The same process of confrontation takes place, but now in the presence of witnesses. That is so an accurate report is obtained, either of the fleshly person's continued disobedience or repentance.

2) In the presence of the church

If the fleshly person still refuses to repent, verse 17 says to "tell it to the church." The whole church is to go to the fleshly person and confront him in a similar manner in the hope of picking him up out of sin. "If he refuses to listen even to the church," verse 17 concludes, "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer." The unrepentant sinner must be put out of the church and regarded as an unbeliever because in the same way leaven leavens a whole lump of dough, the fleshly person will affect the entire church (1 Cor. 5:6-7; Gal. 5:9).

6. What is our purpose in helping?

The purpose of church discipline is restoration. We don't want to put them out of the church, but to lift them up and out of sin. Putting a fleshly person out of the church is a last resort for the sake of the purity and safety of the Body.

7. What is our attitude when helping?

Restoration is to be accomplished "in a spirit of gentleness" (v. 1). The spiritual are not to be overbearing, ungracious, or unkind to the fleshly.

a. Galatians 5:22-23--"The fruit of the Spirit is "gentleness." If you are walking by the Spirit and producing the fruit of the Spirit, you will be gentle. Paul's words in Galatians 6:1 come across as

statement rather than a command. The spiritual gently restore the fleshly because gentleness is a characteristic of their spirituality.

b. 2 Corinthians 2:7-8--Paul said "You should ... forgive and comfort [the repentant sinner], lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him." The spiritual approach discipline with forgiving hearts. They are ready to comfort and reaffirm their love for the fleshly. Their attitude is not abusive, but gentle, tender, kind, and patient.

c. 2 Thessalonians 3:15--"Do not regard [the sinning person] as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Restoration is accomplished by those who love and care.

8. What precaution should we take when helping?

Galatians 6:1 concludes, "Looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted." We are all tempted to sin. Spiritual people are very understanding because they know what it is to be tempted. Jesus was tempted like we are (Heb. 4:15), so He disciplines, chastens, reproves and restores us with an understanding heart. Since Jesus, who never fell into sin, is so understanding, certainly we who have fallen into sin can sympathize with those who have fallen as we have.

So the spiritual never lord it over the fleshly. "looking to yourselves" means that those who think that they are spiritual must take a good look at their own temptability before trying to deal with sin in others. That's to prevent the fleshly from trying to straighten out the fleshly.

B. Hold Them Up (vv. 2-5)

"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" Gal. 6:2-5).

The work of restoration is not finished by the initial confrontation. Verse 2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

1. What to do

a. Ease the load

The Greek word *baros* [baros] ("burden") refers to an excessive, heavy, unbearable load. The Greek verb translated "bear" means "to carry with endurance" or "get under the load." The spiritual are to ease the burden of temptation that the repentant brother or sister in Christ may be subject to after deliverance from the trespass.

b. Fulfill the law

Bearing each other's burdens fulfills "the law of Christ" (v. 2). What is the law of Christ?

1) John 13:34--Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you." That is the law of Christ.

2) James 1:25--Christ's law is the "perfect law, the law of liberty."

3) Galatians 5:14--"The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Lev. 19:18). Christ's law is the law of love. It calls for the spiritual to lift up the fleshly and then keep them up by helping them bear their burdens.

Falling to the flesh results from the burden of temptation. The load can get so heavy that a Christian can fall. The spiritual must help the tempted, or they may fall again and again. Every Christian has their own areas of temptability. We may be hit often with the same kind of temptation. Persistent,

oppressive, heavy temptation is a burden that individual believers don't bear alone very well.

Sin Wants You Alone

Sin prefers to have you alone. The more often you are removed from Christian fellowship, the more tempted you will be. When you are among other believers--in a strong Christian family or in strong Christian friendships--you will benefit from the strength of that relationship. Accountability and the bearing of each other's burdens naturally occur in such settings. We don't do well alone. I know many Christian men who have to travel alone for days on end and who have great battles with temptation that do not exist when they are in the fellowship of God's people. So the spiritual need to bear the burdens of others.

2. How to do it

a. Accountability

Bearing another's burdens presupposes establishing a relationship with that person. I've tried to help carry other people's burdens by meeting regularly with them or by having regular telephone conversations. Usually I ask the people I am helping to keep a list and report to me every time they fell into the particular temptation they are struggling with. They don't like to do that because they don't want to read that list. So they avoid the sin. Accountability will help someone carry the load of temptation.

b. Prayer

Faithful prayer is a crucial element in bearing the burdens of another.

c. Encouragement

Those facing temptation need lots of encouragement. You might consider writing them, giving them study material, or teaching them.

d. Comfort

Paul said to the Corinthians that "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" (2 Cor. 7:6-7). Paul fell to the flesh. The comfort of fellowship and the presence of others uplifted his spirit.

3. What to avoid

a. Being self-righteous

Galatians 6:3 says, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." At times we don't follow up and support stumbling believers because we feel superior. A lot of people like to look down on those in sin. They see someone in sin and they look down on them with a smug, self-righteous attitude.

I was touched by what one writer said of his own experience. "I've often thought that if I ever fall into a trespass, I will pray that I don't land in the hands of censorious, critical, self-righteous judges in the church. I'd rather fall into the hands of bar keepers, street walkers, or dope peddlers because such church people would tear me apart with their long wagging gossiping tongues, cutting me to shreds."

b. Being judgmental

A judgmental attitude is also wrong. It is deceiving because it assumes you're something when you're nothing on your own (Gal. 6:3). It's the Spirit in us that makes us or anything we do

worthwhile.

c. Being proud

If you don't want to get involved with stumbling believers because you think you're too good for that, you again are deceiving yourself. Instead, you better go back and examine your own work to see if you have a just cause for boasting (v. 4). You better not assume anything that isn't really true. Your first responsibility is to examine your own life and be sure that your attitudes are right, that you have a humble spirit, and that you are boasting because of what God has done in your life. Then you will realize you are nothing apart from the power of the Spirit, and you will follow through and help stumbling believers.

d. Being quick to compare

Verse 5 adds that "each one shall bear his own load." That doesn't contradict verse 2. The words translated "load" (v. 5) and "burdens" (v. 2) are different. "Burdens" (Gk., *baros* [baros]) speaks of a heavy burden, whereas "load" (Gk., *phortion* [phortion]) refers to the general obligations of life. Everyone is responsible to take care of his own life without comparing himself to others. If you compare yourself to God rather than those around you, you're not likely to set yourself up as too superior to bend to the need of a sinner.

C. Build Them Up (v. 6)

"Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches."

1. The meaning

This is not saying that preachers are to be paid. The context of the passage requires a different meaning. It is referring to a spiritual person who has come alongside to help a fleshly person. In that process, the spiritual person is obviously teaching the Word to the fleshly person. But the fleshly person isn't to be the only beneficiary of the relationship. He is to mutually share (Gk., *koinoneo* [koinoneo]) with his spiritual helper in all "good things" (Gk., *agathoi* [agathoi], "all noble, spiritual, and moral excellencies"). A relationship of restoration is to be of mutual spiritual benefit.

2. The message

This is a picture of the building that takes place in the restoration process. First there is a confrontation of sin--a call for confession, repentance, prayer, and a return to the standard of Scripture. Then the spiritual person helps keep the fallen brother accountable as he assists in carrying the burden of temptation. Finally both are built up and edified from sharing all the excellent moral truths that flow out of the teaching process.

3. The method

The building process could occur through sharing books, tapes, fellowship in church, and Bible study. Whatever the method, there must be a personal and mutually beneficial sharing of spiritual truths between the spiritual and fleshly person. True restoration requires both confrontation and the sort of relationship that promotes holiness.

CONCLUSION

We are our brother's keeper. Not following through on our responsibility to restore fallen fellow believers is a serious mistake. We must be sensitive to one another's needs. Because we occasionally fall to the level of the flesh, God has ordained that we be accountable to one another in the church. Therefore the Spirit directs those who are walking in the Spirit to participate in the ministry of restoration.

Focusing in the Facts

1. Can the Christian life be lived on an individual basis? Why or why not?
2. When do Christians grow spiritually?
3. When a Christian is fleshly, what happens to his usefulness to God?
4. Corporate ministry requires individual?
5. If a church does not engage in the ministry of restoration, what happens to the believer's motivation to live a holy life?
6. Who in the church has the responsibility to pick up the fleshly from their sin (Gal. 6:1)?
7. What characterizes those who are called to help the fleshly?
8. Is a spirit-filled life something that is felt only? Explain.
9. When you are spiritual, does that mean you are perfect? Explain.
10. What procedure is used in the process of spiritual restoration?
11. During the process of restoration, what is supposed to be the attitude of the spiritual toward the one being restored.
12. Does the process of restoration end with confrontation? Explain.
13. How do the spiritual bear the burdens of the fleshly?
14. What kinds of attitudes must the spiritual avoid with respect to the fleshly (Gal. 6:3-5)?
15. In building the fleshly person up, what kind of relationship is required between the spiritual and the fleshly (Gal. 6:6)?

Pondering the Principles

1. The church of our day is painfully aware of the devastating effect of uncorrected sin in the corporate Body. When the church tolerates individual believers who claim the name of Christ but live like the world, the light of the church begins to fade. Yet it is strange that someone who truly knows Christ would behave like an unbeliever. The Puritan pastor John Owen wrote that believers "find that sin ... fills them with shame, self-abhorrence, and deep abasement of soul. They discern in ... themselves on account of it, an unsuitableness to the holiness of God, and an unfitness for communion with him. Nothing do they more earnestly seek in prayer than a cleansing from it by the blood of Christ; not are any promises more precious to them, than those of purification from it" (The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power, George Burder, ed. [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954], p. 255). Believers--although not perfect--have an abhorrence of sin. Are you concerned that Christ's church be purified from sin? What effort, in the power of the Spirit and under the guidance of God's Word, are you going to make in your life so that you can be an agent for restoring others from sin?

2. Another Puritan pastor, Matthew Mead, wrote that "a Christian is universal in his obedience. He doth not obey one command and neglect another, do one duty and cast off another; but he hath respect to all the commands: he endeavours to leave every sin, and love every duty" (The Almost Christian Discovered, [Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, n.d.], p. 174). The spiritual are to help the fleshly not only to avoid open sin but to be consistent in avoiding hidden sin. But that can be accomplished only when believers are involved in each other's lives. What effort will you make to be involved in the lives of fellow believers so you can prevent help them "leave every sin, and love every duty"? Are there believers involved in your life who can do the same thing for you?

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