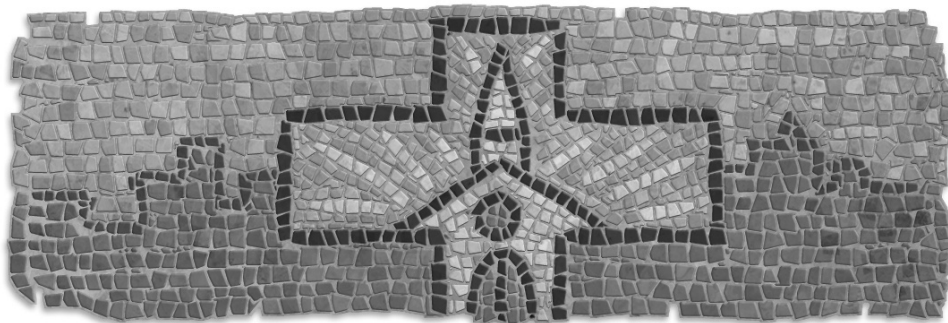


## The Gospel and the Church



### SABBATH—DECEMBER 17

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Galatians 6:1–10; Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 15:1; John 13:34; Luke 22:3.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it. Let us make a special point of doing good to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NlrV).

#### **SOME POTATO FARMERS DECIDED TO SAVE THE BIGGEST POTATOES FOR THEMSELVES AND TO PLANT THE SMALLER POTATOES AS SEED.**

After a few disappointing harvests, they discovered that nature had made their potato crops as small as the size of marbles. Through this bitter lesson, these farmers learned an important law of life.

“They could not have the best things of life for themselves and use the leftovers<sup>1</sup> for seed. The law of life showed that what they planted, they would receive.

“In another way, planting small potatoes is still common practice. We take the big things of life for ourselves and plant the leftovers. We expect that by luck our selfishness will be rewarded with unselfishness.”—Adapted from *International Student Fellowship Newsletter*, March 2007.

Paul uses this principle (important rule) in Galatians 6:1–10. Instead of its members “biting” and “eating each other up” (Galatians 5:15, NlrV), the church should be a place where the Spirit leads people to put others ahead of themselves. Understanding that we are saved by grace<sup>2</sup> should make us humble and more patient and compassionate (merciful) in how we treat others.

1. leftovers—things that remain after something is finished or ended.

2. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

**SUNDAY—DECEMBER 18****BRINGING THE FALLEN BACK TO GOD (Galatians 6:1)**

Paul has high expectations for the Christian life (Galatians 5:16). But his warning to the believers in Galatians 6:1 also is realistic. Humans are not perfect. Even the most faithful Christians are not free from mistakes. In Greek, Paul's words in Galatians 5:16 show that he is expecting such a situation to happen in the church at some time. Paul gives the Galatians useful advice on how to deal with such situations when they come up.

**According to Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15–17, what should Christians do when a fellow believer falls into some sinful behavior?**

To profit from Paul's advice in Galatians 6:1, we need to understand the exact situation that Paul has in mind. Two words used in the first half of the verse are very important. The first word is *caught* (ESV) or *overtaken* (caught up) (KJV). It means "to be detected or surprised." This word suggests that Paul has two things in mind: a believer who "catches" another believer in the act of some wrongdoing and also how a person finds himself "overtaken" by a behavior (read Proverbs 5:22) that he should have chosen to avoid.

The kind of wrongdoing that Paul is discussing is not done on purpose.

We know this from the words he uses. The word translated as "fault" (KJV) or "sin" (NIV), which comes from the Greek word *paraptoma*, does not mean a sin done on purpose. Instead, it is a mistake, a stumble, or a false step. This makes sense when we study Paul's past comments about "walking" in the Spirit. Still, this in no way excuses the person's mistake. But it makes clear that Paul is not dealing with a case of stubborn sin (1 Corinthians 5:1–5).

The proper way of dealing with a person in this situation should not be punishment, condemnation (judging as guilty), or disfellowship,<sup>3</sup> but an act of helping to bring him or her back to God. The Greek word translated as "restore" is *katartizo*. It means "to mend [fix]" or "to put in order." In the New Testament, it is used for "mending [fixing]" fishnets (Matthew 4:21). It also is used to describe the setting of a broken bone. We would not abandon (leave) a fellow believer who fell and broke a leg. As members of the body of Christ, we should gently care for our brothers and sisters in Christ who may make mistakes and fall as we walk together on the path to God's kingdom.

**Instead of practicing Matthew 18:15–17, why do we so often talk badly about the person we are angry with, let our anger boil against the person, or even plan revenge?**

3. disfellowship—the act of not allowing a person to be a member of a church anymore.



The Greek word for restore means to “mend” and is used to mean “mending [fixing]” fishing nets or to set a broken bone.

## MONDAY—DECEMBER 19

### BEWARE OF TEMPTATION (2 Samuel 12:7)

“Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’ ” (2 Samuel 12:7, NIV).

Paul’s words in Galatians 6:1 about guarding our own lives against temptations are very serious. We should not ignore his advice. The way that Paul makes his appeal tells us just how serious he is. The word translated as “considering” (KJV) or “take care” (NRSV) literally means “to look at carefully” or “to pay careful attention to” (compare<sup>4</sup> Romans 16:17 and Philippians 2:4). So, what Paul really is saying is to “keep a careful eye on yourself” because sin can take you by surprise. To make this warning even more serious, Paul changes from the second person plural (“you all”) in the

first half of Galatians 6:1 to the second person singular (“you,” as in one person or individual) in the last half of the verse. This is not a general warning for the whole church group. It is a personal warning for each person within the church.

Paul does not clearly say what the temptation is. Perhaps he does not have one special sin in mind but is simply talking about the danger of giving in to the same sin. At the same time, Paul’s words in Galatians 5:26 against becoming “conceited [big-headed]” (NKJV) suggest that he is warning them against feeling that they are in some way spiritually better than others.



Paul tells believers to keep a “careful eye” on themselves so that sin does not take them by surprise.

**Why would Paul need to warn the Galatians against spiritual pride? Read 1 Corinthians 10:12; Matthew 26:34; and 2 Samuel 12:1–7 for answers.**

4. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

One of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk is the kind of pride that makes us think we are somehow protected from doing certain kinds of sin. The sad fact is that we all have the same sinful nature.<sup>5</sup> It is a nature that is opposed to God. So, without the power of God's Spirit, we could fall into any sin. Knowing who we really are outside of Christ can keep us from falling into the sin of pride. This knowledge also can give us greater sympathy for others who make mistakes.

**How many times have you found yourself criticizing others (maybe even only in your heart) for doing sins that you were guilty of yourself?**

## TUESDAY—DECEMBER 20

### BURDEN SHARING (Galatians 6:2–5)

**In addition to bringing fallen sinners back to God, what other instructions in Galatians 6:2–5 does Paul give to the believers in Galatia? (Read also Romans 15:1 and Matthew 7:12).**

The Greek word translated as “burden” in Galatians 6:5 is *baros*. It means a heavy weight or load that someone has to carry a long way. But, over time, this word became a metaphor<sup>6</sup> for any kind of trouble or difficulty, such as the burden of

a long day's work on a hot day (Matthew 20:12). Paul's warning to “bear [carry] one another's burdens” certainly includes helping to bear the burdens of the weak he mentions in verse 4. But the idea of burden bearing (sharing) Paul has in mind is much broader. Paul's instructions show several spiritual lessons about the Christian life that should not be ignored.

First, as Timothy George writes, “All Christians have burdens. Our burdens may be different in size and shape depending on God's plan for our lives. For some people it is the burden of temptation and the result of stumbling into sin, as in verse 1, here. For other people it may be a physical sickness, or a mental disorder, or a family problem, or lack of work, or many other things. But no Christian is without burdens.”—Adapted from *The New American Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), volume 3, page 413.

Second, God does not plan for us to bear (carry) all our burdens alone. Unfortunately, we often are far more willing to help others to carry their burdens than we are willing to let others help us carry our own. Paul criticizes this attitude of pridefulness (Galatians 6:3) as being false human pride. It is the kind of pride that makes us refuse to admit that we also have needs and weaknesses. Such pride robs us of the comfort of others and prevents

5. sinful nature—any of the fallen qualities or aspects that we as humans are born with. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

6. metaphor—a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar. A burden is a metaphor for hardship or difficulty.

others from doing the ministry (work) that God has called them to do.

Finally, God calls us to bear the burdens of others because it is through our actions that God's comfort is made known. This idea is built on the fact that the church is the body of Christ. An example of this is in Paul's words, "But God comforts those who are sad. He [God] comforted me when Titus came" (2 Corinthians 7:6, NIV). Notice that God's comfort was not given to Paul through his private prayer. Instead, it was given through the companionship of a friend and through the good news that the friend brought.

"Human friendship helps us to bear one another's burdens. It is part of the purpose of God for His people."  
—Adapted from John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, page 158.

**What keeps you from asking for help? Pride? Shame? Lack of trust? Being too independent? If in need, why not ask someone whom you trust to share your burdens?**



God asks us to bear the burdens of others.

## WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 21

### "THE LAW OF CHRIST" (Galatians 6:2–5)

**Paul connects burden bearing with fulfilling the law of Christ. What does he mean by "the law of Christ"? Read Galatians 5:14; Galatians 6:2; John 13:34; and Matthew 22:34–40.**

Paul's use of the phrase "the law of Christ" (*ton nomon tou Christou*) does not appear elsewhere in the Bible. But he does use almost the same wording in 1 Corinthians 9:21 (*ennomos Christou*). This special wording has resulted in a number of different interpretations. Some mistakenly argue that this is proof that the law of God given at Sinai has been replaced by a different law, the law of Christ. Others claim the word *law* simply means a general "principle [important rule]" (read Romans 7:21). This means that in bearing the burdens of others, we are following the example of Jesus. The newer interpretation may deserve some credit. But the idea and almost the same wording in Galatians 5:14 suggest that fulfilling the law of Christ is another example of supporting the moral law through love. Paul shows earlier in his letter that the moral law (Ten Commandments) was not removed with the coming of Christ. Instead, the moral law, supported by love, continues to play an important part in the Christian life. This is exactly what Jesus taught during His earthly ministry. Jesus also practiced this principle throughout His life and

even in His death. So, in bearing the burdens of others, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus. And we, too, are fulfilling the law.



**In bearing the burdens of others we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus.**

Another issue (problem) comes up in these verses. There seems to be a big difference between Galatians 6:2 and Galatians 6:5. But this problem is easily resolved (cleared up) when we understand that Paul is using two different words to describe two different situations. As we have already seen, the word for “burden” in verse 2 is *baros*. It means a heavy load that has to be carried for a long way. But the word *phortion* in verse 5 means a ship’s cargo, a soldier’s backpack, or even a child in the womb. The burdens in verse 2 can be laid (put) aside. But in verse 5 they cannot. For example, a pregnant mother must carry her own child. As this example suggests, there are some burdens that people can help us bear. But there are others that no human can bear for us, for example, the burden of a guilty conscience, suffering, or death.

For these, we must depend on God’s help alone (Matthew 11:28–30).

**Some burdens you can get help with from other people. Some you have to take to the Lord yourself. How can you learn to give to the Lord the things that you, yourself, just cannot bear?**

#### **THURSDAY—DECEMBER 22**

#### **SOWING (PLANTING) AND REAPING (HARVESTING) (Galatians 6:6–10)**

In Galatians 6:7, the word translated as “mocked [made fun of]” (*mukterizo*) shows up only here in the New Testament. But it often appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It means “to turn up one’s nose in contempt [disgust].” In the Old Testament it means hating God’s prophets (special messengers) (2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 20:7). It even is used once to describe clearly a rebellious (warlike) attitude (feeling) toward God (Ezekiel 8:17).

Paul’s point is that people may “forget” God or even disobey His commandments. But they cannot fool God. He is the chief Judge. And in the end they will have to pay the price for their actions.

**What does Paul mean in Galatians 6:8? What examples can you find in the Bible of characters sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit? (Read, for example, Acts 5:1–5; Luke 22:3; Daniel 1:8; and Matthew 4:1.)**

Paul's metaphor about sowing and reaping is not unusual. Sowing and reaping are things from life that appear in many wise sayings from Bible times. What is important is how Paul uses it to focus on his past comments about the flesh and the Spirit. James D. G. Dunn notes, "A modern example is that we are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the results of our choice."—Adapted from *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), page 330.

God does not always deliver us from the earthly results of our sins. But we should not feel lost or hopeless for the bad choices we have made. We can feel joy that God has forgiven us for our sins and adopted (accepted) us as His children. We should make the most of the opportunities we have now to invest in those things that will give a heavenly harvest.

Galatians 6:10 shows that "Christian principles work in two ways: one way is widespread and for all people, as in, 'Let us do good to all people.' The other is limited, as in, 'especially to those who belong to the family of believers.' Paul's widespread appeal was based on the fact that all people are created in God's image (likeness). So, they are very special and important to Him. Whenever Christians have forgotten this important truth, they have fallen victim to the terrible sins of all humans that have stained (spoiled) the human

community from Adam and Eve to the present day."—Adapted from Timothy George, *The New American Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), volume 3, pages 427, 428.

**You are sowing, either for good or bad. What kind of harvest are you going to reap?**

### FRIDAY—DECEMBER 23

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "The Spirit of God keeps evil under the control of conscience. When man puts himself above the influence of the Spirit, he reaps a harvest of sin. Over such a man the Spirit has less and less influence to control him from sowing seeds of disobedience. Warnings have less and less power over him. He slowly loses his fear of God. He sows to the flesh; he will reap [harvest] death and destruction. The harvest of the seed that he himself has sown is ripening. He does not honor God's holy commandments. His heart of flesh becomes a heart of stone. Rebellion [uprising] against truth traps him in sin. Men sowed seeds of evil in the world before the Flood. As a result, there was lawlessness, crime, and violence.

"All should know that the enemy destroys the soul. It is not because of any law that God has sent out against man. He does not make man spiritually blind or stupid. God gives

plenty of light and proof to help man tell the difference between truth and error. But He does not force man to receive truth. God leaves man free to choose the good or to choose the evil. If man turns down proof that is enough to guide his judgment in the right path, and chooses evil once, he will do this more quickly the second time. The third time he will still more quickly withdraw himself from God and choose to stand on the side of Satan. And in this course he will continue until he is set in evil, and believes the lie he has held dear as truth. His stubbornness has gained him its harvest.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1112.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- ① What does it really mean to “restore [bring back to God]” a fellow believer who has fallen into sin? Does bringing a sinner back to God mean that he or she will be the same as before? Discuss.
- ② Because there are some burdens that people must bear on their own (Galatians 6:5), how does a believer decide if he or she should try to help someone?
- ③ How does your church measure up to Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6? What can you do as a person to make a difference?