

6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

In verses 1-5 Paul highlights mutual concern and kindness that is the indelible mark of God's justified people.

Love manifests itself in concern for others. Concern for others extends to those who are tripped up by the lusts of the flesh and in need of restoration. The word "restore" was used of rebuilding walls (Ezra 4:12-13) and mending nets (Matt. 4:21). In secular Greek it was used of setting a broken bone or dislocated limb. The basic idea is "fixing what is broken."

The "spiritual" person is the one who is to do the restoring. "Spiritual people" are not an elite group in the church, but those who are being led by the Spirit and exhibit the Spirit's fruit in their lives (5:22-23). The ones who are walking in step with God need to lead and rebuild the lives of those who are out of step. Those who are walking by the Spirit should also remember that they have the same propensity to sin as the one being restored; their approach, therefore, will be with humility (6:3).

Not only does walking by the Spirit manifest itself in a readiness to restore a brother in sin; it also shows itself in a readiness to bear one another's burdens (6:2). Paul does not specify what burdens he is referring to, nor does he have any type of grammatical connective to ascertain the relationship of this verse to what precedes or follows. Though it is easy to assume that the burdens we are to bear are related to sustaining a brother who is walking in the flesh (6:1), there is no question that this principle applies to any burden believers may have. The point being that we should be so engaged in one another's lives that as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

There are two great truths in this verse we shouldn't neglect observing: (1) there is the assumption that we all have burdens, and (2) there is the fact that one of the great means by which God comes to our aid is by providing us with other believers who can bear our burdens with us. We need not bear our burdens alone (see II Cor. 7:5-7 for this illustrated).

In verse 2b, Paul speaks of fulfilling the Law of Christ. What this means is highly debated. This expression only appears here and similarly in I Corinthians 9:21 (under the law of Christ). Some see this as a counterpart to the Law of Moses. They say that this means that we are now under a new set of laws given by Christ and the Apostles. But for all practical purposes, this would simply be a move from one legal code to another, and in the Book of Galatians where Paul places the law and Christ in such a stark opposition to each other, this seems unlikely. The change brought by grace is more fundamental than moving from one set of rules to another. It is a change from the law governing our lives by external restraint to the transformation of our hearts by the Spirit of God. The Law is no longer the rule of life, Christ is. And if Christ governs our lives then a Christian's conduct is determined by His will, not external commandments. Hodge says, "His will is our law." This is *not* to say that the Law is no longer important,

for the will of God is found in the Scripture which includes the Law. Perhaps the law of Christ could be defined as “prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel (usually embedded in the example and teachings of Jesus) which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love” (Longenecker, 275, 276).

As Riddlebarger says

The apostle has just said that Christians “walk in the Spirit” (5:16), that they “are led by the Spirit” (5:18), that they manifest the gifts of the Spirit (5:22-23), and they “live by the Spirit” (5:25), and he will go on to say that Christians are to “sow to the Spirit.” In context this would mean the “law of Christ” is the spontaneous obedience wrought in the heart of each Christian believer by virtue of the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and as such, the “Law of Christ” stands in direct contrast to the “Law of Moses” which demands perfect conformity to its every stipulation. Since Paul says that the Law is fulfilled in the command to love one another, the Christian, in effect, fulfills the law of Christ, when indwelt by the Holy Spirit, now serves his brothers and sisters in love. In this case, this is evident when Christians help to bear the burdens of those who are weak and who struggle with sin, want, and other such burdens of life.

6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

6:4 But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.

6:5 For each one will bear his own load.

Verses 3-5 are only tied together loosely, but *all three verses involve self-examination*. The pronouns move from “one-another” (6:2) to “himself” (6:3, 4) and “his own.”

“For” connects verse 3 to verse 2 and describes the opposite of the spiritual humility and gentleness needed to restore others and bear one another’s burdens. In ministering to others we must be aware of our own weaknesses: we need to look to ourselves (6:1), understand the possibility of self-deception (6:3), and examine our own work (6:4a).

In verse 3, the expression “thinks he is something” has been used in Galatians 2:6 where it means to be “esteemed by others as being special” (Gal. 2:6 NAS = “those who were of high reputation”). Here it means “to esteem oneself as being special” (Fung, 289). “Deceives” renders a word that literally means “to lead the mind astray” and has the force of “imagining himself” to be something that he is not (Fung, 290). The person who thinks he is somebody is self-deceived since all we have and all we are is a gift from God (I Cor. 4:7). Thus, we are to examine ourselves carefully and realistically lest we also be deceived into thinking that we are more important than we really are.

The temptation encountered when correcting others in sin is to think that we are something when we are nothing; that is, we think that we are morally superior to the one who is sinning. The result will be a

condemning, harsh attitude toward them, instead of a caring, gentle one. Furthermore, those who are spiritually proud or place their own importance above others have little empathy toward the struggles of others. As Fung says, "Paul implies that those who imagine themselves to be somebody are unable to bear the burdens of others: fancying themselves to be without sin or weaknesses they are unable to sympathize with others or to concern themselves with their burdens; conversely, they are more likely to treat others with gentleness and humility if they feel their own weakness" (Fung, 290).

It is odd that in verse 4 Paul speaks about having reason to boast in what we have done, especially since he has just said that we are not able to do what we desire, but can only accomplish God's will through the power of the Spirit (5:17, 18). Wouldn't that exclude boasting altogether? The answer may not be as difficult as it appears. In Greek, the word translated as "boast" is much less appalling of a word than it is in English. It can refer to exultation or the feeling of joy without the negative connotations that the English "boast" carries (Longenecker, 277; cf. Phil 1:26; 2:16; Heb. 3:6). The exhortation is to be able to rejoice in what God is doing in us without comparing ourselves to others.

In other words, it appears that Paul is saying there are proper reasons and wrong reasons to exult (boast) in the graces that we see manifested in our lives. If we boast (exult) because by comparison we appear better than others, it is pride. But if we examine *ourselves* to see if our lives are pleasing to God, and we find the grace of God at work in us, we have legitimate cause to rejoice. Too many are apt to think well of themselves, because they are not as bad as someone else, but what brings satisfaction, peace, and comfort to the soul is the testimony of God's transforming work in our lives. It is the evidence of His work in us that gives us cause to glory. As Calvin says, ". . . by comparing ourselves with others, the low opinion which we form of them leads us to entertain a high opinion of ourselves. Paul declares that no such comparison ought to be allowed. Let no man, he says, measure himself by the standard of another, or please himself with the thought, that others appear to him less worthy of approbation. Let him lay aside all regard to other men, examine his own conscience, and inquire what is his own work. It is not what we gain by detracting from others, but what we have without any comparison, that can be regarded as true praise." Calvin then concludes, ". . . the glorying of which this passage treats, is that of a good conscience, in which the Lord allows his people to indulge, and which Paul elsewhere expresses in very animated language." (Acts 23:1; II Cor. 1:12)

Verse 4 made it clear that we should examine our own lives before God. Verse 5 tells us why we should examine ourselves, namely, because we are answerable to God for our actions. We will bear responsibility for what we have done, not for what others have or haven't done.

Most see an allusion in verse 5 to the future judgment as well. The judgment is a time when bearing one another's burdens cannot be shared (Ro. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). On that day, you cannot carry my load and I cannot carry yours. That should mellow our hearts from the temptation to judge others.