

Burden Bearing.... and Benevolence?

Galatians 6:1-10

There are N.T. books written to tell the story of Jesus to various groups- Jews (Matthew), Romans (Mark), Gentiles (Luke), and Everyone (John). There is also one written to recount the history of the Church- Its *beginning* and *spread* (Acts of the Apostles). There are several written to various individual congregations at specific places to provide additional guidance and further instruction (Romans – Thessalonians). There are a few written to individuals (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). There are general epistles (Hebrews – Jude), and there is even one book of prophecy (Revelation), but there is only one book written to churches in a specified region- **Galatians**.

The overall context of the letter to the Galatians has a lot to do with Jewish-Gentile relations within the church. Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (in *effect*, become *Jews*) in order to be accepted into Christianity, cf. Acts 15:1 and Gal. 1:6-8; 2:4, 15-21; 3:1-2, 15-29. From the very outset, Galatians is a fiery letter filled with righteous indignation and grave disappointment (1:6-10; 3:1-5; 4:9-11, 21; 5:7-12, 15), as well as great love, (4:12-16, 20).

It is within this context and backdrop that our text 6:1-10 occurs, and yet it has application value also to those not *overtaken* in this particular *trespass* of which the Galatians were guilty. Let's look at some of what the passage has to say in a more specific way.

“Brethren,” v.1. He is addressing those who have been *baptized into Christ*, and thus *adopted as sons of God*- whether *Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free*, cf. 3:23-29.

“Caught” (or *“overtaken,” KJV*), ***v.1.*** The Greek word is *prolambano*, which literally means to *take before*. Thus, the meaning is that one is *ensnared* or *taken before* he realizes it. Such may even include the idea that he *doesn't yet even realize it at the time*, cf. 2:11-13.

“In any trespass (or *“fault,” KJV” v.1.* Though most of the epistle deals with sins associated with apostasy or hypocrisy dealing with binding the Law of Moses on Gentile Christians, Paul is careful to include within the parameters of this prescribed procedure that it is good for *“any trespass,”* or violation of the gospel, cf. 5:13-21, 24.

“You who are spiritual,” v.1. Obviously, this would be those *not* overtaken by the *trespass* or *fault*- those *walking by the Spirit*, cf. 2:18-20; 5:22-25.

“Restore such a one,” v.1. The *restoration* is both *back to* and *by* the truth of the gospel, and the salvation it provides in Christ Jesus, cf. 1:6-9; 2:14-17, 20.

“In a spirit of gentleness,” v.1. Sometimes, we get the idea that Paul was belligerent or abusive to Peter and Barnabas back in 2:11ff. He was probably more *forceful* with Peter and Barnabas because of *who* they were, and the impact of *their influence* on others, but nothing in the text indicates or justifies such an attitude, cf. 4:12, 15-20. There is no doubt that Paul was angry and frustrated, but such does not mean that he was, or that we should be in similar circumstances, rude or crass, cp. 1Thess. 2:7.

“Looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted,” v.1. There is always a *danger* of being *caught/overtaken* in the same *trespass/fault* before you realize it yourself, cf. 2:13b; 5:13-15; 1Cor. 10:12.

“Bear,” v.2. The Greek word here is *bastazo*; it means *to take up in order to carry*. It does not mean to *pick up and place back on the one* who has been overtaken by it! Instead, it is to *put on oneself* something to be carried. The idea is that the *spiritual* should endeavor to *carry the burden of the one overtaken* back to faithfulness, cf. Luke 15:5ff.

“One another’s burdens,” v.2. *Burden* is from the word *baros*, and refers to that which is *abundant* or *excessive*- thus, the *weight* of sin; as Jesus *carried our burdens* to the cross! If He did such for us, surely we can do what we can to *lift and carry* the burden of another back to *restoration*! This is done by and through *gently* but *surely* and *clearly* presenting them with the truth, just as Paul did for Peter and Barnabas, and the Galatian church!

“For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself,” v.3. This has specific reference to the overall context of the letter- *i.e.* that *one believes* and *trusts* in *circumcision* and *the Law* above and in addition to the gospel, cf. 1:6-8; 3:1-5ff. Those referenced failed to take the attitude and course of Paul, Phil.3:1-14.

“Let each examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another,” v.4. One had no initial choice in the matter, and took no direct action himself, to become a Jew under the Law. He was *born* to Jewish parents, who *circumcised* him on the eighth day, cf. Phil.3:3-4. But to become an *adopted son of God* through *Jesus Christ* required *personal faith*, and the *personal decision and activity* to be *baptized* in Him, 3:25-29!

“For each shall bear his own load,” v.5. The KJV translators made this verse more difficult than it should be by translating the Greek word *phortion* as “*burden*” as they did *baros* in v.2. This made Paul appear to contradict himself, when such is clearly not the case. *Phortion* refers to the *cargo* or *load* of a ship- that which it *normally carries*, and is therefore designed and built to carry. It is, thus, distinct from the *excessive* or *abundant* (burdens) associated with *baros* in v.2. In the immediate context, *phortion* refers to the *normal, everyday task* of being an *adoptive child* of God, (see again the comments above on vv.3-4). This *task/load* no one else can, or can be expected to, *bear* for you. However, it is the *excessive/abundant burden* of being overtaken in an *unseen/detected fault* that the *spiritual* are required to *take up and carry* for one another!

“And let the one who is taught the word shall all good things with him who teaches,” v.6. With your permission, let’s skip this verse for now and come back to it in a bit.

“Do not be deceived...” vv.7-8. Such as in v.3b, or otherwise, for:

- “*God is not mocked*”- the sower *reaps* as he has *sown*, v.7;
- *Sowing to the flesh* yields *corruption from the flesh*, v.8a; 5:15-23; and,
- *Sowing to the Spirit* yields *eternal life from the Spirit*, v.8b; 5:22-26.

“And let us not lose heart in doing good...” v.9. In context, the *good done* is: *restoring those caught in trespass(es)*, v.1; and thus *bearing one another’s burdens* in *fulfillment of the law of Christ*, v.2; having a *correct view of one’s own work and self*, vv.3-4; *carrying one’s own load*, v.5; and *sowing to the Spirit* rather than to *the flesh*, vv.6-8.

Now, given this context, isn’t it strange that Paul would insert a verse about *the support of preachers* in v.6; and one about *universal church benevolence* in v.10? Of course it’s strange- because he didn’t do that! Keep these verses (vv.6,10) within their *specific*

context of this passage (*restoring those caught in trespasses*), and the overall context of the book (correcting the error *Gentiles having to become Jews and keep the Law of Moses to be Christians*), cf. 6:13-16. Thus,

“The one who is taught the word,” v.6a, refers to the “man caught in any trespass” who has been “restored” of v.1a, rather than congregations supporting a preacher (which hasn’t been discussed anywhere in the letter). And, “him who teaches” is the “spiritual” who has *born the sinner’s burden in fulfillment of Christ’s law by restoring him with and to the truth of it, vv.1-2*. So, what are the *good things* he is to *share*? A proper response of *repentance and return* (rather than 4:16 or 5:15) is to be *fellowshipped* (the Greek word translated as *share*). How so? If the *caught in trespass one* doesn’t so respond to the *spiritual one’s* gentle efforts toward his *restoration* in this manner, then “God is not mocked” and he will *reap destruction* as he has *sown it, vv.7-8*! And, finally...

“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially those who are the household of faith,” v.10. You see? This verse is not about *benevolence*- either toward Christians or non-Christians (which was obviously a concern of Paul, cf. Rom.15:25, but hasn’t been discussed at all in this letter) at all, unless we regard *restoring those caught in any trespasses* to be “benevolence”! In context- both *general* and *specific*, this (*restoring the fallen*) is the *good to be done* “to all men, and especially those of the household of the faith”!

Now, **what do these things mean to you and me?** A couple of things:

1. *Anyone* is capable of being *overtaken* in a fault, v.1; 1Cor.10:12.
2. The *spiritual* are required to *restore* the fallen *to* and *with* the truth of the gospel with a *spirit of gentleness*, v.1; Matt.18:15-17; 1Cor.5.
3. Thus, when we are *overtaken*, we should *expect gentle* help, v.2; 2:11ff. (When *helping* others with *their* sin, do so as *you* would want them to do for you, Matt.7:12.)
4. Everyone is responsible for *their own normal/everyday task* of being a Christian- no one can, or should attempt to, *be a Christian* for you, vv.3-5! So, don’t expect or require them to do so.
5. We will ALL *reap* what we *sow*- either *corruption from the flesh*, or *eternal life from the Spirit*, vv.7-8.
6. *Universal* personal benevolence is taught in Luke 10:30-37 and Jas.1:27, and *fellowship* (to *Christians*) church benevolence is taught in Acts 2:45; 4:32-35; Rom.15:25-27; 1Cor.16:1-2; 2Cor.8 – 9, but Gal.6:10 is not about church benevolence- either *universal* or otherwise. And likewise, there are several passages that discuss *paying preachers*, but Gal.6:6 is not among them.