

Galatians 6:1-5

Gal 6:1 (NKJV) **Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵ For each one shall bear his own load.**

In [Galatians 6](#), Paul closes out his letter with one exhortation after another in v1-10. The following are the exhortations: restore those who have been overtaken in a fault, bear one another's burdens, examine what you are doing, share good things with those who teach you, do not be deceived, do not grow weary in doing what is good, and finally to do good to all. As we have seen throughout the study of any book, doctrine always precedes exhortation and application. Just telling someone what to do is not exhortation. Exhortation has to have a foundation, and for the Christian that foundation is doctrinal truth. So, Paul has just completed his teaching on the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Without overstating or spiritualizing what Paul is saying, this passage seems to just be a continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a believer who is actually walking and living in the Holy Spirit. In some ways, it is just a natural continuation of Paul's explanation of what is the actual "**fruit of the Spirit**" in [Galatians 5:22-23](#) – restore brothers who are in sin, help bear other people's burdens, make sure that you are doing good things, and do not grow weary in doing those things. These are the obvious evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

So, what does it mean to restore a brother who is overtaken in a trespass? When does a believer step in to another person's life and try to help them, and when does it become more meddling than helping? Probably the most important question to ask is what actually makes someone "**spiritual**" and how can the believer know that he is spiritual enough to restore a brother? Paul is not talking here about some elite corps of amazing and phenomenal Christians when he uses the word "**spiritual**" – not at all. Every one of us should be considered "**spiritual**" men or women. The word "**spiritual**" is translated as "**spiritual ones**" in the Greek Interlinear and comes from the Greek word "*pneumatikos*" and specifically refers to men who are living their lives in such a way that God is pleased with how they are living.¹ This believer is someone who is specifically living under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit, and that reality is evident by the fact that the fruit of God's Spirit is visible and evident in his life. When someone looks at that person's life, they see good things, they see spiritual things, they see the ongoing work of God in their life. It is an evident and obvious work, and should be. They have love and joy in their life. They are patient and longsuffering with people. They have self-control in their speech and in their habits. They are someone who is gentle and faithful and someone who can be trusted. These are the attributes that define and describe a "**spiritual**" person, and the one who can actually help "**restore**" someone who has been overtaken in a fault.

The reason that this is so important is because one of the fundamental attributes necessary to actually help the brother who has been overtaken in a fault or a sin is the quality of "**gentleness**". There are certainly times when someone may need to be rebuked firmly, but this verse is not talking about that kind of circumstance. Whatever it is that the person needs, Paul implies that it must be done in a spirit

¹ Vine, *pneumatikos*, ep.

of meekness. No one likes for people to be harsh, angry, impatient, and/or overbearing with them. That is not a good way to make progress in helping someone and is the exact reason why the word “**gentleness**” or “**meekness**” is called out here. You do not want someone who is not under the control and influence of God’s Spirit to be correcting someone. The root word for “**gentleness**” or “**meekness**” simply means that we have an attitude of spirit where we accept God's dealings with us as good and do not dispute or resist Him.² So, it is that same kind of spirit and attitude with which we are to approach the individual who has been overtaken by some sin in their life - not arrogantly, not self-righteously, but very humbly, very graciously. You never just announce someone’s sin to everyone else – never. That is arrogance. The kind of spirit with which we correct someone is probably the same kind of spirit with which they will most likely respond to our correction. I am so conscious of my own imperfections and weaknesses that I realize that I need to be as considerate and gentle as possible with everyone that I may have to help.

It is interesting that Paul does not actually use the word “**brother**” in this case, but simply calls the person who is trespassing against God as “**a man**” – “*anthropos*”. However, it seems since he uses the word “**restore**” that he is actually talking about another believer. If he was talking about a lost person, to what would they be restored? So, first of all, what does it mean for a man to be “**overtaken in any trespass**” and the secondly, what does it mean to “**restore**” someone? The word for “**trespass**” is the Greek word “*paraptoma*” and it can refer to one of two specific kinds of transgressions. It can mean either something that is unintentional on the person’s part or something they do that is very willful. Sometimes we may fall into sin unintentionally. This particular Greek word does not describe intentional, willful sin, but comes from the Greek word “*pipto*” which simply means to fall. It is described as someone walking along and simply stepping on some loose soil, losing their footing, and falling. It could happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. It could be a loose rug. It is the idea that someone just slips. So, even though there are some words in the New Testament that describe very strong sins, this word for “**trespass**” is not one of them.

We just have a momentary lapse in our self-control, and so what we do is not some kind heinous sin in our life. We just made a mistake, made a bad decision, and it caused us to sin in some way.³ So, the word “**trespass**” (“*paraptoma*”) can mean exactly that and does not necessarily carry with it some kind of rebellious quality, but more of a simple lapse of self-control. It could just be called a “blunder”. The idea is that the brother simply got tripped up in his life and he needs some help to recover. So, when you “**restore**” someone, you pick them up, you lift them up, you help them up. On the other hand, though, “**trespass**” can also mean something that someone has done that does imply culpability, accountability, and blame, and because of that, it creates a kind of shame and guilt in the person’s life. However, that second meaning does not appear to be that to which our context is referring. The NIV simply says “**someone is caught in a sin**” and the HCSB says “**someone is caught in any wrongdoing**”. The ISV says “**a person is caught doing something wrong**”. The NLT says “**if another believer is overcome by some sin**”.

Now, I think these translations are better, but there is still another aspect that must be understood and it has to do with the word “**overtaken**” (“*prolambano*”). The meaning of this word is not that of us

² Zodhiates, 1209.

³ Strong, #3900, ep.

catching or detecting another believer in some sin, but rather of that believer actually being caught off guard by a sin.⁴ It was often used to speak of an animal that got suddenly caught in a trap. It would be similar to Peter boldly declaring that he would never deny the Lord, but then denied him three times. It just caught him by surprise. So, it is the distinct idea that the person was surprised and caught off guard by some sin that took place in his life. In fact, in this context, the idea of being surprised by the sin is what should be emphasized.⁵ It was just a moment in which the believer let his guard down, and at that moment he was overtaken by the sin. That is a very subtle nuance of the word, but it is really at the heart of what Paul is addressing.

Every one of us, just from personal experience, should be able to recognize and appreciate how easily sin can creep into our lives and hurt us, as well as hurt other people. Sin is a trap and it sets traps for us. These verses simply are not talking about premeditated sins, so it is critical that we follow the guidelines of this passage so as not to hurt someone who needs to be restored. Temptations can be very strong, very powerful in a person's life – and especially someone that God is working in their life in a very meaningful way. God told Cain in [Genesis 4:7](#) that sin was crouching at his door. It was right there, right at the threshold of his life and he did not even know how powerful that temptation and sin would be. [Galatians 6:1](#) portrays the reality that we can actually be running from some sin in our life, but find that sin just seems able to run faster and stronger than we can. It is the idea of being overtaken in exactly that way – that even though the believer was fighting against the sin, it simply overtook him, and overpowered him. It was not what might be called a deliberate sin, but an unfortunate sin that happened in a moment of weakness in his life. It is like the brother was caught unawares by some sin before he actually realized what was happening to him. This is a very real scenario for even the most committed of Christians. The overall consensus in most all of the better commentaries interpret this passage in that light.

This is not minimizing sin in someone's life, but at least trying to balance out the struggle that sin creates versus someone's power to resist it. Some believers, no matter how sincere and how transparent they may be, may still struggle mightily with some sin in their life at different times. So, what v1 does for us as conscientious believers is to serve as a warning to us on the correction side of this scenario. I.e., we are not to be sitting in judgment of the brother or sister who is struggling. Listen to these verses on this issue of the stronger Christian standing in judgment of weaker Christians,

[Romans 14:1](#),

Ro 14:1 (NKJV) **Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.**

[Romans 15:1](#),

Ro 15:1 (NKJV) **We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples (weaknesses, failings) of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

[1 Thessalonians 5:14](#),

⁴ Vine, *overtake*, ep.

⁵ Precept, *Galatians 6:1*, ep.

1Th 5:14 (NKJV) **Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.**

Galatians 6:1 is a plea from Paul for compassion and understanding, for forbearance and the giving of help to a weaker brother. It is imperative that we be patient with people, kind to them, and an encouragement for their life. Tearing someone down who is struggling with sin will never help build them up in their faith. We do not want to be the cause of adding to someone's burdens. To the contrary, we want to help relieve their burdens, and especially those caused by some sin in their life. If we are not careful, we can become very legalistic with someone, but the problem is that the legalistic is always harder on others than they are on themselves. That is exactly why at the end of v1 that Paul says that the believer is to first examine himself before he gets into the reproving business – **“considering yourself lest you also be tempted”**. Obviously, it is important that I demand more of myself than I demand of others. That is the place of humility that will keep us in check.

The reason this is so important is because these two words for **“overtaken”** and **“trespass”** appear to eliminate the idea of a premeditated act or practice of sin such as would be the case in **Galatians 5:21** where people actually **“practice”** some grievous sin. That is not to say that we should not approach other believers about those kinds of things, but simply that this verse has a different connotation. This is aimed at just helping another brother who finds themselves somewhat overwhelmed with some struggle and some sin in their life. I really like how the modern Greek version translates this when it says **“even if a man, through lack of circumspection, should fall into any sin.”** I.e., the brother was simply not paying attention to some area of his life and just got caught off guard. I do not want to eliminate the fact that someone may do something inappropriate and do it willfully, but it does not appear that that is the overall focus of what Paul is addressing. He seems to be addressing the brother or sister who simply needs some help in their life. There are many believers who do not seem to have the resolve to work on various parts of their personalities or their temperaments, and they just need someone to come along side them and give them some spiritual support. They lack the personal initiative and determination that is necessary to become more like Christ in our life, so being able to help that person in a practical way is very important to their personal development if they will allow you to help them.

So, the point is that in **Galatians 6:1** it seems that Paul is addressing sin in general, and it is the kind of sin from which someone can and should be restored. Just the use of the word **“restore”** seems to imply that the kind of sin to which Paul is referring is not some gross, heinous, dreadful, scandalous sin in the person's life. It could be, and even though the Greek word for **“trespass”** (*“paraptoma”*) can specifically refer to that, the overall context of restoration seems to lean in the direction of someone just doing something wrong, of lacking self-control in an area of their life, of lacking resolve to make the changes. That can happen to anyone. Stated another way, this individual is recoverable, workable, and most likely will be responsive to any corrective action that another person takes in their life to help them. Now, one observation that is often made is that Paul is referring back to the sins that are defined by **“the works of the flesh”** in **Galatians 5:19-21**, and in some ways there is nothing in **Galatians 6:1** to preclude those gross sins as part of Paul's encouragement here. However, **Galatians 5:21** is very clear when it says that the people who are actually practicing these kinds of sins are not Christians and **“will not inherit the kingdom of God”**. So, based on that, it seems that those kinds of sins are not the same sins that Paul

is addressing in [Galatians 6:1](#). It could include some of those sin, but most likely is not his primary focus.

The entire goal of this verse is that of restoration. The word “**restore**” (*katartizo*) means to repair something, to make an adjustment on something. It carries the idea of mending something like a net that has been torn. It does not mean that the whole net is no longer usable, but just that a part of it needs to be fixed. The fundamental idea is to bring something back to its appropriate condition so that it can actually function properly.⁶ It means that something in someone’s life has become broken and is no longer working properly, so we come along side to help them. In classical Greek, the word for “**restore**” was a surgical term used when someone would set a broken bone for a person.⁷ When you take the time to try and help someone who has fallen in some sin, it is a great way to let them know that you really care about them. Too very often, the church has had a tendency to shoot the wounded rather than helping mend their broken bones.

I really like the way this idea of restoration is identified in [1 Thessalonians 3:10](#) when Paul told the Thessalonians what he was doing for them,

1Th 3:10 (NKJV) night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking (*katartizo*) in your faith?

I.e., Paul wanted to help these believers grow in their faith, and so when he saw things that he knew could use some adjustments, he was caring enough to address those areas that needed improvement. It certainly is not clear from this verse that Paul is talking directly about repairing some kind of grievous sin in their life, but simply helping them grow in their faith. The difference between this verse and [Galatians 6:1](#) is simply that v1 is speaking of some specific sin in the person’s life with which they are struggling. [Hebrews 13:21](#) says something similar, but uses the verb “to perfect” or “to complete”.

Heb 13:21 (NKJV) make you complete (*katartizo*) in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

[1 Peter 5:10](#) says almost the same thing.

1Pe 5:10 (NKJV) But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect (*katartizo*), establish, strengthen, and settle you.

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⁶ Zodiates, 842.

⁷ Precept, *Galatians 6:1*, ep.

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