

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 our last study we finished v2 and what it meant to help bear the burdens of someone who had been overtaken in a fault, someone who had become trapped by some sin in their life. What we understood about the word “**overtaken**” was that it was not a word about someone who was intentionally living in sin, but someone who had just been overcome by some personal weakness when they may have just let their guard down. I.e., it was not the kind of sin where you just went and rebuked someone, but rather you went and helped them by bearing their burdens and struggles with them.

So, beginning in v3, it is important that we do not remove these next three verses out of that context of bearing someone else’s burdens, of being willing to help restore someone who needs that kind of help in their life. Now, it immediately appears that v3 is both a warning and a caution to the believer who has recognized that his brother or sister is struggling in some area of their life, but for whatever reason he thinks that he is somewhat above actually helping them, above getting involved in that brother’s or sister’s life. I like the way that the NLT translates this verse. It says,

Gal 6:3 (NLT) If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

I love that translation. However, the problem is that the phrase “**to help someone**” is not in the actual Greek text at all, but it is the translators way of specifically connecting v3 back to v2. It is how they interpret the intent of what Paul is saying – that we are to actually help someone who is struggling in an area of their life.¹

The Greek word for “**thinks**” is “*dokeo*” and it refers primarily to imagining, to supposing, to be of a certain opinion, and in this case to be of a certain opinion about ourselves spiritually. It is not the same word we would use for reasoning, contemplating, studying, being academic, for deliberating, and for learning and resolving. In this case, it is specifically talking about the person who “**thinks himself to be something**”. The word “**himself**” is what provides additional information about how the word is to be understood. It is also in the present tense, which means that this is a very normal way of this individual thinking, of imagining, of supposing what he may be like. In this context, it means to regard something as being true about ourselves, but without having any actual certainty or even assurance as to whether it really is true.² There are plenty of people, myself included, who have certainly had an inflated view of our value. We would probably call it an “assumption” that someone is making about themselves. It could be expressed as “it seems to me...” or “I think...”. I do not know about you, but I am more than convinced that personally I have been much more deceived and conceited about my own spirituality than I ever have about someone else’s spirituality – and that is exactly what Paul is addressing. If you really

¹ Moo, 378.

² Precept, *Galatians 6:3*, ep.

want to be unpopular with other people, then just think really highly of yourself and see what happens. When I worked at the site, the managers that I disliked working for the most were those that just portrayed themselves as being smarter than everyone that worked under them and for them. It was always obvious, and it is always obvious to others when we are that way. The problem with sin and with the pride that Paul is addressing here is that it always flatters us. It always tells us that we are not as bad as someone else and that we are better than others. It always exalts our personal strengths and tells us that we are less self-centered, more patient, more kind than others, and more faithful than other people are. It always does that. Jesus reprovved this attitude and tendency in the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 7:3](#) when He said,

Mt 7:3 (NKJV) And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

Talking about being self-deceived, that has to be the ultimate verse.

Once again, we cannot lose sight of the issue. It is simply whether or not we are willing to help someone that needs our help. In the case of a believer actually helping someone who is under a trial or affliction, maybe that believer thinks that he is just too busy, or that the struggle the brother is having is not really worthy of him spending time to help resolve the struggle. Maybe he just does not care about the other person that much. It could be any number of reasons that someone may choose not to help someone, and so that is the scenario that Paul is addressing. The simple issue of this warning is that we not think of ourselves and our time and our efforts as being so important and so valuable and so significant to hinder us from condescending down to someone else's needs. It really is an attitude check to help us determine whether or not we are willing or not willing to help someone that is spiritually struggling in some area of their life.

Please notice what Paul's conclusion to this is. He says that if we think that way that in reality we are **"nothing"**, and have become self-deceived. The word **"nothing"** in this context expresses in a very strong and absolute way the idea that the person's spirituality is of no account and has no spiritual weight or character to it.³ It really is a word that exposes the true level of spirituality that we may or may not possess. That is the expositional thrust of this word. So, if we are ever going to measure where we might be spiritually, then it is vital that we use God's measuring rod, and in this case, it is making sure that we are willing to help someone that we know is struggling in some area of that life that has outwardly overtaken them.

Now, what Paul says is that the believer who approaches other people's struggles from a somewhat aloof spiritual position is what he refers to as being deceived – **"he deceives himself"**. This is the only usage of this word **"deceives"** in the New Testament, and there is nothing complicated about the meaning of this word. It simply means to be deluded about reality. Because the word is coupled with **"himself"**, it means that the individual has a very deluded view about his own spirituality. It means that the individual who is not willing to help a brother or sister out when they are struggling spiritually is seriously misled and deluded about their own spirituality and actually become fairly useless to God. This is the problem that the Pharisees had – they had no concern whatsoever for true righteousness, for genuine faith. It was always about themselves, about what they wanted, and never about the needs that someone else may

³ Zodhiates, 980.

have had in their life. In reality, when someone actually stumbled in their spiritual life, rather than helping them and restoring them back to spiritual health, they condemned and judged the person. I immediately think of the woman taken in adultery and how arrogant they were in their condemnation of that woman's life. Obviously, none of us would condone what the woman had done in her life, but neither should we condemn her. People have struggles, they have needs, and we are much better prepared to help them if we are not condemning of them. The way that Christ treated her was the exact opposite of how the Pharisees treated her. The issue is really very simple – how we respond to someone else's failures reveals a great deal about our own level of spirituality and about our own walk with God.

The simple truth is that our pride will make it impossible to help anyone. In reality, it is a seductive thing to overestimate our own personal worth. The problem is that it is so easy when we think that we are walking with the Lord and are spiritually minded to begin to see ourselves as spiritually stronger than others. When that happens we actually begin to look down on those that are struggling as if we are superior to them in some way, and it is easy at that point to become judgmental rather than compassionate, to become condescending rather than humble. The person who for whatever reason thinks that they and their priorities are too important to help another brother who has a legitimate need in their life is only fooling themselves spiritually. I think it would be a true and accurate maxim to say that arrogance and pride in our life about our own level of spirituality will quickly cut us off from the lives of other people. We will find ourselves always placing ourselves and our priorities and our preferences above other people that truly have legitimate needs in their life.

At this point it is important to appreciate that everyone has burdens and problems, no matter what someone's perception of them is, and it certainly appropriate to say that we cannot help with every need that every person has. These burdens and struggles can run the gamut from moral temptations to family issues to financial issues to marital problems to personality quirks to physical ailments to employment problems to even something like demonic oppression. Someone was telling me just last night about a person that had a kind of emotional meltdown at their workplace. It could happen to anyone who lives under the constant pressures that a very difficult work environment can impose on them. Then to make it worse and compound everything, a person can have several of these types of issues happening at the same time in their life. At that point, everyone is vulnerable to failure and it is exactly then that our compassion for them needs to prevail. [Romans 8](#) says that the entire creation is groaning and that we are groaning with it. I clearly understand that verse!

It seems that one of the issues that is drawn from this passage is simple. It is a myth to think that God wants us to carry all of our burdens by ourselves in a kind of spiritual isolation from the body of Christ. There was an ancient philosophy known as Stoicism and what it taught was a kind of proud self-sufficiency and arrogance that encouraged the individual to deal with the harsh elements of their life with an attitude of independence and personal autonomy over the difficulties.⁴ From God's perspective, however, nothing is much more unspiritual than independence from the body of Christ. We are members of one another and we are called on by God to be a part of each other's lives, as well as each other's struggles. The attribute of self-sufficiency and social isolation is actually a sign of spiritual pride. What Paul is clearly communicating in this verse is that the believer who refuses to help other believers with

⁴ George, 413-414.

their burdens or the believer that refuses to allow someone to help them in their struggles, that believer is self-deceived and is living under the spiritual illusion of pride.

The Scriptures call on every one of us to be spiritual priests to one another, to bear the burdens of others, and in so doing to fulfill the law of Christ. There is a great passage in [2 Corinthians 7:5-6](#) which says,

2Co 7:5 (NKJV) For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. ⁶ Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,

Paul is describing his life, his fears, his conflicts, his struggles. He says that we was “**troubled on every side**”. I am not exactly sure what all of that means, but everywhere he turned, struggles and afflictions awaited his life. He was a giant of a Christian, but inside he was just like us and had fears and was constantly oppressed by every conceivable kind of spiritual struggle possible. Whatever any of us may be going through is probably very minor compared to what Paul was experiencing. Then it reads “**Nevertheless**” – what a great word! “**Nevertheless**” God sent Titus to Paul and he was deeply comforted and strengthened. So, how did God strengthen Paul, how did God renew Paul, what did He use in Paul’s life to help him? This is great, this is fabulous! He simply sent him a brother and a friend to be an encouragement to him. What a great picture of the outworking of [Galatians 6:3](#) – God simply sending a brother that was sensitive and tender to what was going on in Paul’s life, and a brother that knew how to give comfort in the midst of very harsh trials and afflictions.

We all need this kind of person in our life. It can be your marriage partner, a great friend, a mentor, a teacher. It can be anyone that has a heart and a drive to help other people and that motivation should be obvious to you. Not everyone is good at knowing how to help other people, so there has to be some level of discernment with whom you may choose to share your struggles. The person needs to be compassionate and trustworthy, and they must be willing to invest some time into your life. That is a critical element that must be discerned. You will find that there are many people who will be willing to listen to you share about your problems and struggles, but not actually spend any time with you to help resolve those issues. In my mind, they are much more of a liability than an asset to helping you. You go to them for encouragement, but what you receive is relatively superficial, and then there is never any follow-up with you. The Scriptures are clear that “**hope deferred makes the heart sick**”.

Maybe the best question to ask ourselves out of this study is really a very simple one – am I an encourager to other people? Am I willing to invest my life into their life, or do I think that I am just too busy to help other people or get involved in their life? One hint about whether or not you really are an encourager is simple. Someone who has this gift and this calling on their life does not become dissatisfied with slow progress. Why is that? It is because they realize that no one changes overnight. Meaningful spiritual change is a process, not a moment. So you have to be patient when helping someone that is struggling. However, you can be assured that your sincere concern, efforts, and time spent with someone will always have a positive and meaningful impact on their life, so just give them time to learn how to adjust to your encouragement.

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