

“Keep On Keeping On” (Galatians 6:1-10)

Many years ago, football coach Bud Wilkinson, was asked his opinion of football as a national sport. He replied that football was lacking, for it consists of “twenty–two men who are desperately in need of rest being watched by twenty–thousand people who are desperately in need of exercise.” This principle is also true in most local churches where the servants are in need of rest and the spectators are in need of spiritual exercise. But how do we solve this problem? It’s easy to gripe and complain about church members who don’t contribute their time, talent, and treasures to the local church; however, this doesn’t accomplish anything. What ends up happening is sacrificial servants who are already doing too much ministry fall under conviction for not doing enough while those who need to serve ignore their responsibility.

A far better alternative is to appeal to the hearts of believers. While every believer was given a new heart at conversion, many believers are suffering from a “hardening of the priorities.” In other words, family, work, hobbies, sports, entertainment, and personal leisure have crowded out serving God and others. Hence, there is a dire need for spiritual heart surgery to ensure that the heart priorities are in proper working order. In Gal 6:1–10,¹ Paul issues a simple challenge: *Lend a helping heart*. In these ten verses, God gives us two relational responsibilities.² Our first responsibility is to . . .

1. Help others by exercising sensitivity and humility (6:1–5). When we are sensitive and humble in our interactions with other believers, God can use us to impact others. Paul writes, **“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.”** Paul is writing to Christians like you and me who are dealing with personal and church challenges. The verb “caught” (*prolambano*) has the connotation of being overtaken by surprise by something.³ It was sometimes used for a bird or an animal caught in a trap and points to sin’s subtle temptations and traps.⁴ The word “trespass” (*paraptoma*) has the idea of someone who was on the right path, but veers off.⁵ Paul isn’t referring to a rebellious believer in a determined lifestyle of sin, rather this believer merely took a wrong turn.⁶ Paul’s remedy is for those who are spiritual to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. The description “spiritual” should not be misconstrued to mean “sinless.” Spiritual people are those who walk by the Spirit and exude the fruit of the Spirit (cf. 5:16–18, 22–25). Such believers are commanded to “restore” an erring believer. The verb “restore” (*katartizo*) is a present active imperative, which means we must continually restore until Jesus returns. The word was used to signify resetting a broken bone or mending a torn net.⁷ In spiritual contexts it meant perfecting in spiritual maturity and equipping for service.⁸ In 1 Cor 1:10, Paul uses the same verb to express his desire that the divided church in Corinth “be perfectly united.” The church had been broken and torn by divisions; it needed to be reset as a physician would reset broken bones and mended as a fisherman would repair torn nets. Here in Gal 6:1 “restore” calls for spiritual therapy so that a broken member of the body can once again work properly and perform its vital functions for the benefit of the whole body.

The key to spiritual restoration is to do so “in a spirit of gentleness” (cf. 5:23). One of the reasons hurting people don’t want to come to church is that they do not view the church as a place for healing, but as a place where people will jump on their broken bone and break it again.⁹ We must work to change this mindset. Our goal must be as patient with others as God has been with us. This is confirmed by Paul’s final phrase “. . . each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (6:1b). Have you ever wondered why doctors wash their hands so often? Not only must they avoid giving germs to their patients, they must also guard against receiving germs from their patients. Paul says that we should be careful in our restoration lest we should catch the same sickness as our friend. Satan is tricky. He knows that if he can get one Christian spiritually sick or trapped in sin, he may soon get another and then another. In our attempts to help struggling Christians, we must be careful that we don’t succumb to sin. We must always seek to restore ensnared believers. *Lend a helping heart*.

A number of years ago, an angry man rushed through the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam until he reached Rembrandt's famous painting "Night-watch." Then he took out a knife and slashed it repeatedly before anyone could stop him. A short time later, a distraught, hostile man slipped into St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash Michelangelo's beautiful sculpture, The Pieta. Two cherished works of art were severely damaged. But what did officials do? Throw them out and forget about them? Absolutely not! Using the best experts, who worked with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to restore the treasures.¹⁰ Likewise, your brother and sister in Christ is every bit as valuable as one of these portraits or sculptures! *Lend a helping heart* and attempt to restore a brother or sister who is ensnared in sin's grasp.

Verse 1 deals with restoration and 6:2–5 with prevention. In 6:2, Paul urges us to bear overwhelming burdens. One of the chief ways that we can be Christ's hands and feet is by supporting other believers through this life. Paul writes, **"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."** While this verse is a great general principle, it is located in the context of sin and restoration. Thus, bearing one another's burdens deals specifically with sin in a believer's life or the consequences of other's sin that has affected the believer. The verb "bear" (*bastazo*) is a present active imperative meaning that we are to continually bear the burdens of one another. Paul places the Greek word translated "one another" (*allelon*) as the first word in 6:2 for emphasis. He wants us to care for our fellow believers. The word translated "burdens" (*baros*) was used of a crushing weight put on a domestic pack animal (cf. Matt 23:4).¹¹ It refers to a heavy load—one that's too big for one person to carry alone. Are you helping to bear someone else's burden? You can't always *take* another's burden, but you can help him carry it. Restoring a fellow believer doesn't mean you take her consequences for her, but you can help her bear any consequences that may be involved in her restoration.¹² In doing so, you can "fulfill the law of Christ." "Fulfill" (*anapleroo*) is a strong word that means to accomplish wholeheartedly.¹³ "The law of Christ" referred to here is the summation of the law: "Love your neighbor."¹⁴ Simply bearing another believer's burden may be the most important thing that you do this week for this may be one of your greatest expressions of love for God.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870), the great novelist, once said, "No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another." Who do you know that is carrying an unbearable burden? Do you know someone that is going through a painful divorce or is currently separated from his or her spouse? Do you know someone that was recently widowed? Are you aware of someone that has wayward or rebellious children? How can you help this believer bear his or her load? *Lend a helping heart*.

In 6:1–2, Paul addresses those burdens that Christians are to help others bear. In 6:3–5, he speaks of those burdens that we alone must bear. He specifically states that something must be laid aside if we are to be a burden-bearer and that is conceit. We must never exude an intolerance of error in others and we must never assume that we are above failure. In 6:3, Paul puts it like this: **"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives¹⁵ himself."**¹⁶ The word "for" (*gar*) provides the grounds for Paul's words in 6:1b: "each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." Paul wants you and me to understand that we are nothing apart from God's grace. You and I are capable of the most atrocious sins humanly imaginable. This sobering reality ought to instill a healthy dose of reality and humility in all of us. We must refuse the subtle temptation of spiritual pride. It's very easy to look down your nose and say, "They deserve it." "She's so weak." "He just can't handle the pressure." "I saw it coming." "Maybe they'll listen to me next time." "I don't want to get involved." "I'm just glad it's them and not me." "I know I would never do something like that." These statements are incredibly dangerous and they stem from an exalted view of one's spirituality and an incorrect view of one's potential to succumb to sin. The more we know God, the more we recognize that we are nothing apart from Him. The more we observe our own sinful tendencies, the more we will be humbled and the want to grant others grace.

Paul adds to this thought in 6:4 by stating: **“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.”** The remedy for arrogance is to “examine” (*dokimazo*) one’s own work. Once again, this is a present active imperative with the connotation of “to test with a view toward approval.” The use of the singular “work” (*ergon*) refers to one’s service in the community.¹⁷ I don’t know about you, but I am far from satisfied with my own work in the church. There is always so much more to be done. I never feel like I do enough. I never feel like I study the Word enough or that I love the body enough. This facilitates humility and brokenness in me. It causes me not to want to look down on my brother or sister or compare my life or ministry with someone else. When we stand before Christ one day, we will stand alone. We will not have anyone else to compare our faithfulness to Christ with. Therefore, Paul urges us to examine ourselves because at the time of judgment they will give an objective account of our lives. If we derive our sense of status from others (whether in comparison to someone else, or by taking credit for another’s ministry), we are in the wrong. Instead, we must *lend a helping heart*.

Paul concludes in 6:5 with a short and sweet verse: **“For each one will bear his own load.”**¹⁸ The word for “load” (*phortion*) is different from the word “burden” (*baros*) in 6:2. A “load” was a technical term for a soldier’s backpack filled with his needed equipment. It is not a crushing weight; rather, it is a weight that you can carry yourself. Paul is saying: Each Christian must bear his own “load” (6:5) so as not to overload, or unduly “burden” (6:2), other believers. Don’t ask your brother or sister to carry your backpack for you. In other words, don’t ask someone else to meet your responsibilities for you. You have to carry your own backpack. So the question is: Are you carrying your own backpack? Are you meeting your responsibilities before the Lord in your personal life, family life, and church life?

[We are to help others by exercising sensitivity and humility. As we do so, we *lend a helping heart*. Our second responsibility is to . . .]

2. Help others by exercising generosity and tenacity (6:6–10). When we are generous and tenacious in our commitment to ministry, God can use us to build up our local church. In 6:6, Paul writes, **“The one who is taught¹⁹ the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.”** Every Christian who is walking with the Lord is receiving teaching from someone. Thus, we need to bless those who are providing for our learning. Perhaps you’re thinking, “Oh, how self-serving! This must be Keith’s favorite Bible verse.” Not so fast! This verse is a general statement of responsibility with a wide application. The question to ask is: What sources am I or my family receiving “instruction in the Word?” It may be from a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, a Vacation Bible School teacher, a small group leader, or a personal mentor. Maybe you’re helped from radio or television Bible teacher, an author, or a musician. You may have been impacted by a Christian camp, a college, or a seminary. If so, share “all good things” with those who have taught you. The word “share,” *koinoneo*, is the verb form of the noun *koinonia*. This term indicates that our giving is really a spiritual partnership.²⁰ As we share, we partner with God’s people in God’s work. It is one of the most rewarding experiences in life.

We owe a great debt of love and gratitude to those who have taught us God’s Word. If your heart is pricked by this statement, you will respond with a generous heart. The primary application of this verse is to show your support through a financial gift. However, there are many other ways you can share with those teachers in your life. You can send a hand-written card or e-mail of appreciation. You can verbally affirm them. You can give away a material possession (e.g., a TV, furniture, car), but please make sure it’s not a dilapidated, leftover item. Many people want to give the preacher or another servant an inferior item and then go out and purchase an especially nice item for themselves (e.g., big screen, leather sofa). You can offer a service (e.g., child care, household repairs, grocery shopping). Think outside the box and creatively try to be a blessing to those who have impacted you and your family. If you have been helped by this church or some other ministry, don’t just be a taker, be a giver as well. You will be greatly blessed by God and those ministers and ministries will be enriched. *Lend a helping heart*.

In 6:7–8, Paul continues his discussion of finances and service. He says that we must remember that our present actions affect our future harvest. Paul puts it like this: **“Do not be deceived,²¹ God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”**²² Paul warns Christians not to be deceived, which implies that Christians can be deceived. What can we be deceived about? We can assume that we can choose to opt out of giving to the church and serving in the church and not face consequences. In fact, many Christians envision that at the judgment seat of Christ when they stand before Jesus He will wink and say: “You didn’t give and you didn’t serve, but that’s no big deal. Yeah, you could have impacted thousands of people, but you lived for yourself and your own desires. But don’t sweat it—someone else picked up your slack.” I can assure you that this will not happen. Paul says, “God is not mocked.” This term “mocked” (*mukterizo*) literally means “to turn the nose up at.” We do not so much break God’s laws as much as we break ourselves on God’s laws. You can’t sow to the flesh all day long and then pray for crop failure. You can shoot an arrow into the sky and repent while it is in the air, but that won’t stop the arrow from hitting the ground. Repentance pardons your sin but it does not cancel its consequences. If you waste this life, there are consequences in this life and in eternity.

In 6:8, Paul contrasts two types of sowing. The person who sows into his own flesh will harvest the works of the flesh found in 5:19–21. “Corruption” (*phthora*) is a term used for a field in which the produce is too rotten to harvest (Heb 6:8). In this context, Paul is saying that some believers will yield a life of rotten fruit. These believers will be unfruitful and their works will be incinerated at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:15). However, He who sows to the Spirit will reap “eternal life.” This does not mean that eternal life is earned by works. Rather, Paul is saying that everlasting life is the glorious end of those who follow the Spirit’s leading (Rom 6:22). The phrase “eternal life” (*aiōnios zōē*) does not necessarily mean “go to heaven when I die.” In its most basic form, eternal life refers to the knowledge of God (John 17:3). It can refer to a quantity of life or a quality of life. The New Testament writers spoke of eternal life as a gift that one receives by faith (John 10:28). However, it also refers to the *quality* of the believer’s life that depends on the extent to which he or she walks with God in fellowship (John 10:10). Thus, wherever eternal life is viewed as a reward, it is obtained in the future. But wherever eternal life is presented as a gift, it is obtained in the present. In Gal 6:8, Paul states that eternal life is the direct consequence of sowing to the Spirit by giving and serving. This is not a reference to salvation, but to a rewarded life here and now and then there. When you *lend a helping heart* you will make a difference in this life and the life to come.

Paul concludes this section with two of my favorite verses. In 6:9–10, he writes: **“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”** The first phrase is so important: “Let us not lose heart in doing good.” The expression “lose heart” describes a bowstring that has become unstrung.²³ It is easy to lose heart, especially in the spiritual realm. Ministry is demanding! Because we live in a fallen world and deal constantly with fallen people, it’s easy to grow weary and say, “What’s the use?” Yet, Paul promises that in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. The key is: Don’t lose heart and give up! The Christian life is a life of perseverance. Talent, gifts, education, and experience will not bring about a harvest; only perseverance. I am constantly astounded by those men and women who continue to serve in the church over decades. Although these individuals have had disappointments, frustrations, and hurts along the way, they continue to persevere in their love for Christ and His bride (i.e., the church). These brothers and sisters are my heroes. They are in the trenches of ministry serving the Lord. To these individuals, Paul says: Keep on keeping on because there will be a wonderful harvest to come. That harvest will partly come in this life and much of it will come in eternity. Today, will you recognize that those who make the greatest impact for Christ are those who persevere in ministry?

Paul exhorts you and me to do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” Although this passage’s general principle can be applied to all the world’s poor, we should especially seek to find ways to help suffering Christians, and particularly our persecuted brothers and sisters throughout the world in places such as Sudan, China, Indonesia, and the Middle East.²⁴ Dorcas serves as a special illustration of what Paul has in mind: she “was always doing good and helping the poor” (Acts 9:36). More specifically, she assisted believing and unbelieving widows by providing clothing she had made.²⁵ A couple in our church had a bake sale this week and raised \$1,280 for those who are suffering in Haiti. A generous donor then doubled our gift for a total of \$2,560. God wants you and me to invest in the needs of the world and those that surround us in our own neighborhood. It is impossible to be over-generous in the work of the Lord. We ought to give and then give again and keep on giving. Why? Because when you give to God, you are sowing to the Spirit and from the Spirit you will reap a vast harvest.

A sculptor once showed his studio to a friend who spotted a very strange statue. It was the figure of a man with hair completely covering his face and wings on each foot. “What is the name of that statue?” he asked. The sculptor replied, “His name is Opportunity.” “Why is his face hidden?” “Because men seldom know when he comes to them.” “Why are there wings on his feet?” “Because he is soon gone, and when he departs, he cannot be overtaken.”

Opportunities come and then they go. Today, will you take advantage of the opportunities that come your way? There are so many opportunities to the serve the Lord. It may involve teaching Sunday School, leading an Awana club, opening your home for a small group, working with prisoners, visiting the sick, sharing Christ, giving meals to the hungry, saving a failing marriage, or giving money to someone in need. The list is endless because the needs of people are endless. Start where you are! Start with the needs around you! Start with the people you know and meet and see every day. Then open your eyes to wider horizons. Pray for God to give you open doors. You can’t meet them all but you can do something. *Lend a helping heart.* When God has your heart, everything else follows.

Scripture References

Galatians 6:1–10

Galatians 5:16–26

Matthew 18:15–17

James 5: 7–9, 19–20

Romans 12:17–21

Romans 14:10–12

1 Corinthians 15:58

Study Questions

1. When have I helped “restore” a Christian brother or sister (6:1a)? Did I do so in a gentle manner with pure motives? How did the ensnared believer respond? How did I guard myself from falling into sin (6:1b)? What lessons did I learn from this intervention experience?
2. When have I recently bore another believer’s burdens (6:2)? How did my compassion and care minister to this brother or sister? During my Christian life, what has God taught me about humility (6:3)? How does a sober awareness of the judgment seat of Christ prepare me to live my life well today (6:4–5)?
3. Have I sought to bless those who teach God’s Word to my family and me (6:6)? What tangible expressions of love, kindness, and generosity have I felt led to extend to these teachers? How did the teacher(s) receive my gift? What ways can I share with teachers what God has given to me?
4. When have I sown to my own flesh (6:7–8)? What were the consequences of my sin? How have I sown to the Spirit and reaped great reward? How have I witnessed the spiritual “laws of the harvest” come to fruition in the lives of other believers? What have I learned from my observations?
5. When am I most prone to lose heart in serving others (6:9–10)? How can I strive to improve my ministry perseverance? What believer(s) am I presently seeking to bless and serve? How am I also serving unbelievers? What is holding me back from serving others more effectively? Who is God calling me to serve today?

Notes

¹ For this structural division, see the UBS4 Greek text.

² “A believer is free from the Law of Moses and possesses liberty in the Spirit, but he must fulfill the law of Christ, and this can be done in the power of the Spirit. Such a life involves sacrificial service directed toward sinning Christians, burdened Christians, the pastor-teachers, and all people.” Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT*. Edited by John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor, USA, 1988), 609.

³ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 393. *Prolambano* does not represent “a settled course of action but an insolated action.” F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 260.

⁴ Cf. Eph 4:14; 6:10–18.

⁵ “Any trespass” probably recalls the sinful “works of the flesh” in Gal 5:19–21.

⁶ A perfect example is Peter who, after boasting that he would never desert the Lord, denied him three times.

⁷ See Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19.

⁸ See 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:12; 1 Thess 3:10; Heb 13:21.

⁹ Tony Evans, *Returning to Your First Love* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 300–1.

¹⁰ http://preceptaustin.org/galatians_commentaries_3.htm#6:1-5.

¹¹ In the context of Galatians, “burdens” is used metaphorically for the oral traditions of the Judaizers.

¹² Evans, *Returning to Your First Love*, 302–3.

¹³ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 178–79.

¹⁴ See Gal 5:14; Matt 22:39; John 13:34–35; Rom 13:8–10; Jas 2:8–12. As a way of life mature Christians are to carry their weaker, less mature brothers (cf. Rom 14:1; 15:1).

¹⁵ The verb *planao* (“deceives”) occurs only once in the entire NT, meaning to seduce oneself into error. The noun form appears in Titus 1:10. Self-deception is the worst kind of blindness.

¹⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 3:18–19; 8:2; 2 Cor 12:11.

¹⁷ David W. Kuck, “‘Each One Will Bear His Own Burden’: Paul’s Creative Use of an Apocalyptic Motif,” *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 293.

¹⁸ We all have our load we must carry, but as Jesus said, His burden is light (Matt 11:30).

¹⁹ The English word “catechism” is derived from the Greek word *katecho* translated as “taught” and “teaches.”

²⁰ There is a parallel passage in Rom 15:27 that expressly points out the teaching that believers should provide materially for their instructors. Paul is ambiguous enough in this passage to include the thought of material and spiritual sharing. Paul also fleshes this out in 1 Cor 9:11 and 14. The word “share” (*koinoneo*) is also used in Phil 4:15 in the context of financial support. One way to bear other believers’ burdens (Gal 6:2) is to share in all good things, including financial support, with one who teaches God’s word. After all, teachers and preachers work hard in their ministry (1 Tim 5:17).

²¹ This is a present passive imperative with a negative particle which usually means to stop an act which was already in process. They were already being deceived.

²² The apostle has argued at length that such works cannot justify (Gal 2:16) or sanctify (3:3) anyone. However, good works are, in fact, an important *fruit* of the life of faith (5:5). In 5:19–23, the apostle describes the attitudes and actions of those controlled by the “flesh” versus those controlled by the Spirit.

²³ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 4:317.

²⁴ See also Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, revised and updated (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2003), 230.

²⁵ Gene A. Getz, *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 182–83.