

## The Epistle to the Galatians: The Gospel of Grace

### Lesson 18: Restoring a Sinning Brother (5:26-6:6)

**“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone think he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.”**

It’s important for us to remember that context is king. Yes, these verses were chosen as a block of text to be studied together, but that shouldn’t give us the idea that Paul’s beginning an abstract thought. The translators of the Bible help us to split the text up with headings so that we might locate texts quicker, and have a general idea of the point of the text going in. As you’ve probably noticed, the natural break in the ESV text is 6:1, where your bible has the heading “Bear One Another’s Burdens”. Half of the commentaries that I read and compile to bring to you these lessons prefer to make the break one verse earlier at 5:26. That’s okay that we study this way. By sliding 5:26 into this lesson, we’re not taking a verse out of context! As I’ve mentioned many times before, chapter and verse numbers are not inspired by God, they’re inserted by man for indexing (and many other helpful) purposes. I wanted us to think contextually at the start of this lesson, not being distracted by the man-inserted chapter break, and not forgetting that 5:25 was written just one verse ago.

We’ve just concluded two lesson on the topic of ‘Walking by the Spirit’ and concluded with verse 25, where Paul commands everyone to **‘keep in step with the Spirit’**. We spent time in verse 16-25, talking about how that meant choking out the sinful desires of the flesh, literally crucifying our flesh, and how that also meant that we walk closely with God so that the Spirit would produce the fruit of the Spirit in our heart. The application of ‘keeping in step with the Spirit’ continues now into this lesson, as we consider how walking with the Spirit changes the way we relate to one another in the church.

Let’s read verse 26 again, **“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”** The Greek word for ‘conceited’ is *kenodoxoi*, which literally means “vain-glorious” or “empty of honor”. So, to be conceited then is really to have a deep insecurity in your heart, where you feel like you deserve more honor for the person that you are, and so you strive mightily for others to recognize your worth. Conceited people go through life constantly comparing themselves with others. Because conceited people have an inflated view of their selves, they frequently determine how much better they are than other people, which satisfies the estimation of their worth. However, when a conceited person crosses paths with someone that they perceive is better than them, the insecurity that they harbour inside devastates them. The conceited person is high, or low, depending upon how they feel they “stack up to the competition”. There’s no avenue of life where it’s commendable to be a conceited person , but it’s dangerous especially in the church, where there *is* no competition. The Greek word for ‘provoking’ is *prokaleo* which is a competitive term, meaning to challenge someone to a contest. That’s what conceited people do, isn’t it? A person who feels like they’re a superior athlete might provoke a perceived inferior athlete to a contest, so that they can publicly showcase their superiority. Conceited people also ‘envy’ other people. To envy someone is to be jealous of them. In this case the envy would be to be like another person in the church, or to have people look at us the way they look at them.

Paul has painted in one verse, two ways that conceited people behave relationally. They provoke those people who they perceive that they are better than, and they envy the others that they perceive are better than them. In both cases, whether were talking feeling superior or inferior to someone else, the label is 'conceit'. It's conceit because the heavy focus is upon how the other people make you look and feel, when a person keeping in the step with the Spirit they will be focused upon how they could make the other person look and feel.

Tim Keller writes, *"The only difference between the person of arrogance and the person with low self-esteem is that the inferior person has lost at the game, and despairs about themselves and envies those they see as "winners". The superior person, on the other hand, feels as though they have, for the moment, won, and continually compares themselves with others to check they are still winning. Of course, much of the time we are both provoking in one area of our lives and envying in another."*<sup>1</sup>

While provoking someone sounds like arrogance, and envying someone sounds like jealousy, and they sound like opposite emotions, they're not. Both attitudes are flip sides of the coin of conceit. The way to stop being conceited (which we all are to some degree if we're honest) is to walk by the Spirit. If we walk by the Spirit, we will walk humbly instead. As C.S. Lewis once said, *"Humility is not thinking less of yourself: it is thinking of yourself less."*

Consider the following so that you might expose the sin of conceit in your heart, and repent of it. Are you the type of person who blows up in anger? That is the mark of a provocative person. Are you an argumentative person? That also shows that you are provocative. Do you tend to look down on people often as being less intelligent, have less beauty, less class? When people criticize you, is it your instinct to fight back? Do you ever tell yourself that you'd never fall into the same sin as someone else? These are all marks of conceited people who tend to provoke others. But what about the flip side? Do you tend to shrink into a ball when the going gets tough? Do you complete avoid every difficult situation? Are you embarrassed and intimidated by many people? Do you crumble under criticism? Do you ever look at people and think to yourself that you could never do what they do? These are the marks of a conceited person who is envious of others.

All people are a blend of these two sides of conceit, usually favoring one side or the other. But there is a third category. There is hope of us to find the middle ground, where we can live to honour God and not continue to sin against Him. That hope is found only in the gospel. Only those who are Spirit-indwelt, only those who are the recipients of God's grace and mercy can overcome the sin of conceit. It's only those who understand that Jesus paid it all, and all to Him I owe, that can get past the mentality that judged my worth before God based upon me and my accomplishments (or inability to accomplish).

The gospel alone is what humbles a person so much that they can boast in Christ alone for all that they are and have. The gospel alone can give a person the boldness that they need to accomplish necessary and mighty works for the glory of Christ. In the world's estimation, it takes self-confidence to change the world. In the Christian worldview, we walk in the confidence that our Lord is worthy to be honoured and praised. The world is filled with those who either provoke, or envy (a positive and a negative charge if you will). The Christian attitude is boldness, and humility (likewise a positive and negative charge). You can learn to be a humble person, and yet be bold enough to get dirty in the fight for holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Tim *Galatians For You* The Good Book Company p.161

All of this talk regarding the reality of the sin of conceit in our hearts, and the ability to overcome this sin through the indwelling Holy Spirit, made possible only through the gospel, brings us to 6:1, and the point of this lesson. All of us must confess and repent of the natural inclination to be conceited, because all of us will, at many points in our lives, be required to restore a sinning brother or sister in Christ, and our hearts need to be in the right place first.

Verse 1, **“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”** Tempted to what? To become conceited in every way we’ve already discussed, and hurt the situation rather than help it. To give a practical example of this, consider that you discovered privately that a brother or sister had committed a sin that was sizeable enough to require a confrontation. The provocative person would first of all remind themselves that they would never do such a thing. And they would possibly take pride in confronting this sibling in Christ to point out the error of their ways. They might be harsh in their words. They might cause the sibling in Christ to be hurt and angry. The provocative person may then blow up at any criticism thrown their way in rebuttal.

The envious person may see the same sin, and feel as though they weren’t good enough to say anything to that person. The envious person may value the sinning brother’s friendship so much that they’re afraid of losing that person. They feel as though they haven’t got the intelligence, or the charisma, or the vocabulary, or whatever else is necessary to help this person, so they just don’t. The envious person is more concerned with their image, or safety, or comfort, to address a situation that desperately needs addressing.

*Let’s take one important step backwards!* Paul says if we see anyone is caught in any sin. Let’s think logically about that for a minute and remember that we’re all sinners. If we’re to confront each other every time that we see a sin in each others lives, we wouldn’t have time to do anything other than confront each other. We are not to be a people known for being super-critical. Nor are we to be a people who “tell it like it is”. I’ve met people (even Christians) who believe (I’m being sarcastic) that their gift from the Holy Spirit is to be blunt with everyone about everything. You’re mistaken if you’ve ever convinced yourself that straightening people out constantly is Christlike. There is a way to express love one to another in Christ. Let’s consider a text that’s been read at every wedding ever, **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”** (1 Cor. 13:4-7) Sibling love in Christ is expressed in gentleness and patience. We overlook the petty annoyances (sins) that we notice as we walk together, and we love each other. We don’t take the high ground one over the other, nor do we hide in the bushes out of fear of one another. We don’t speak harshly and offend one another.

But that being said, when we discover a sin in a sibling in Christ that is sizeable, we have to do something about it. There are some sins that we just can’t sweep under the rug. There are some sins that are just too big, or too destructive, to not have a serious conversation over. When those moments come, we must be ready and willing to help in the most Christlike way. This is the moment when those **“who are spiritual”** (those who are walking by the Spirit) will jump in and help in any way that they can. Paul’s not referring to the Pastor, the Deacons, and the elderly with decades of experience behind them. Those Christians **“who are spiritual”**, who are ‘walking by the Spirit’ (5:16) are categorically supposed to

be every Christian in the church. The first responsibility of a believer in Christ who seeks to restore a fallen brother is to pick him up.

Paul closes verse 1 by saying, **“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”** A humble Christian will realize that they have the same sinful nature as the brother or sister that they’re confronting. An image that Pastor Scott taught me many years ago was quite helpful to my understanding of how alike the vilest sinners is to the most holy of sinners, in comparison to God. The analogy that he taught me was to picture two sides of an ocean, where God sat in His holiness on one side, and humanity sat in total depravity on the other. Every gospel believing Christian knows that the only way to get to the other side is for Christ (who has bridged the gap) to bring us there. From the perspective of our growth in Christlikeness, we see how some Christians tend to thrive in holiness, while others not so much. On the scale of holiness therefore, we see some Christians figuratively swim further than others, and get a little closer to the other side. The point is this: So what if you swam 10 kilometers more than someone else, you’re still 6,000 kilometers from the other side. Our growth in Christlikeness is comparatively little to our brothers when we consider the holiness of God. This should spark a humility in our hearts, as we realize that (outside of Christ) we’re nearly a mirror image of the worst sinner in comparison to God.

And so even the mature saint needs to keep a watch on themselves. Anyone, even the spiritual brother, can stumble and fall into sin. So Paul tells us to ‘keep watch’. The term emphasizes a continual, diligent attentiveness to the purity of our hearts before God in every way. Without this constant watch over a sinful heart that can’t be trusted, we too could fall into the same sin as the brother or sister that we’re confronting. Until we believe with all of our heart that we carry this same sinful vulnerability, we will not be an effective minister to them, we’ll likely do more harm than good.

Verse 2, **“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”** One of the ways that we can bear one another’s burdens is to get involved in the messiness of life and push each other gently along in Christlikeness. Paul alludes to this fulfilling the law of Christ, tying back to what he said earlier in 5:13-14, **“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of this neighbor love. We are to love everyone with the exact same love that Christ has for us.

If we put the two thoughts together then, to bear one another’s burdens is to love our brother. If we see someone caught in a sin and we let it be, it’s no different than driving by and seeing someone trapped in a car and not attempting to rescue them. ‘Burdens’ can really mean a million things, and they don’t have to be the result of a sin in their life. Maybe a brother or sister is having trouble in their family life. Maybe they’ve suffered the loss of a job and times are tough. Maybe they’ve been diagnosed with a terminal illness, or someone close to them has? Maybe they’re battling a secret addiction and it’s hurting them inside. None of us can pick up on these things from a smile and a handshake or a hug on any given Sunday morning. In order to know these things, their needs to be an effort to grow close into the lives of our siblings. Their needs to be a transparency about us, and an openness.

Verse 3, **“For if anyone think he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”** I think that this verse is quite simple to understand. We’re not going to be useful to a brother caught in sin, or a brother who is deeply burdened and needs help, if we’re puffed up in our own pride. Looking into the

mirror and seeing something magnificent is prideful. The problem however lies in the mirror, because regardless of how the mirror distorts our perception of ourselves, the reality of our condition is that we're not 'something', we're weak. And so we deceive ourselves. One note that I'd like to make regarding this verse is the word 'nothing'. We'd take away the wrong impression if we thought that Paul were calling us worthless objects of nothingness. That's not what he's saying here. He's simply contrasting two ends of the spectrum, *"You really think you're something! You don't realize how weak you are, and how far you have to go!"*

We don't like to think of ourselves as 'nothing', and certainly as beings made in the image of God, we have dignity and worth, and so we aren't nothing. But we need to remember just how 'total' our total depravity really is! We were dead in sin, as the rest the world is. We are alive in Christ, yet our old sinful nature is still with us. And so as we consider being a blessing to a brother or sister in need, we need to remember that any position that we are in, any level of holiness we have grown too, is the direct result of the blessing and grace and mercy of God upon our undeserving soul! We must always remember what Jesus said, **"Apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5)

Verse 4, **"But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor."** Why should we test our own work? We ought to check our own lives first, so that we can be an effective help and encouragement. It's not helpful for a brother who's caught in the same sin, to point out the sin in someone else. I'm reminded of Jesus' teaching on judging others. It's not that Jesus taught that it was unloving or overly-critical to judge someone. What He taught is that we first examine our own hearts. Matthew 7:3-5, **"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."**

It makes sense, doesn't it? You wouldn't take advice on a haircut from someone whose hair was a mess. You wouldn't take financial advice from someone in financial ruin. That doesn't mean that the person with messy hair is incapable of notice your messy head. It doesn't mean that a poor person can't recognize that you're poor. But if your going to be in a position of help, you need to be in a position to give help. So we need to examine our lives closely, and determine whether or not we fit under the category of someone walking by the Spirit. If we determine that we are walking in a right manner before the Lord, then we have a reason to boast. When we can see how much God has blessed us, not materially, but spiritually, and when others can see that spiritual strength in our life, we have a reason to boast. But it's not a conceited boast in ourselves, it's a boasting where God gets all of the praise and glory. This boasting has nothing to do with our neighbors (our fellow siblings in Christ). It has nothing to do with how much we've grown compared to them. That comparison will always give us blurry results.

Perhaps we belong to a church where everyone is growing along quite nicely in Christ. We'd be growing in a great way, and God would be due much praise, but because we're comparing ourselves with everyone else, we might wrongly conclude that we're not growing much at all. Conversely, a person might belong to a church where people are lethargic. And because they've got a mild passion to serve God, they might conclude that they're truly pleasing God with their life. Comparing ourselves against our brothers and sisters therefore is never the right standard. We are not to boast in our neighbor. We are simply to examine our own hearts, to see if we're indeed in the faith, and boast in God when we see His work in us.

Verse 5, **“For each will have to bear his own load.”** At first glance, this seems to be a contradiction to what Paul just told us to do in verse 2. “Bear one another’s burdens...for each will have to bear his own load.” So which is it Paul? Are we supposed to share each others burdens? Or carry them all alone? Rest assured that these two verses are not contradictory, rather they’re complementary. I want to help you’re understanding of what I just said by explaining what ‘complementary’ means. I didn’t say ‘complimentary’. “*I love your hair!*”, is a compliment. Verse 5 isn’t giving verse 2 a compliment. To ‘complement’ verse 2 is to complete (or perfect) it. IOW, there needs to be a right balance between sharing one another’s burdens, and bearing our own.

Perhaps it will help us a bit more to unpack the Greek words used in each verse. In verse 2 we’re told to bear one another’s *burdens* (baros). Baros refers to carrying a heavy load, like a ship, or a transport truck does. Imagine if a single person were asked to throw the load of a freighter onto their back, and transport it to its destination. That’s obviously an impossible situation, but with the help of others, resources can be pooled together and the load can be carried. We are commanded therefore to carry the load of our brothers and sisters, and to be willing to ask them for help in carrying our load. The second responsibility of a believer, after picking him up, is to help with the load and hold him up.

The word in verse 5 however is different. The word for load is *phortion*, and it speaks of a weight similar to something that you would throw in a backpack for a hike. This is a weight that everyone is expected to handle on their own. This is a light weight that everyone can handle, or it would be categorized as pure laziness and entitlement to presume that someone else carry it for you. This is the weight of our own personal responsibility before God. No one can carry that load, you are the only one responsible for you. Charles Spurgeon has a lengthy discourse on this topic that I would like to share with you.

Verse 6, **“Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.”** The third and final responsibility of a believer seeking to restore a sinning brother after picking up, and holding him up, is to build him up. While certainly this verse is commanding the fallen brother to share all good things with the one who has picked him up, this term is mutual. The word for ‘share’ is what we get the term ‘fellowship’ from. IOW, there needs to be a mutual sharing (building up) between the teacher and the one who is taught.

Some of my commentaries interpret this verse as the command for the congregant to support his Pastor financially, so that he is well taken care of. It’s always a challenge for me when my books land on different sides of a verse, because I’m forced as the teacher to decide which PhD’s interpretation is incorrect. So I admit that it took a bit of mental sweat to decide which interpretation I will present today. Some commentaries think that verse 6 is telling us that we need to make sure that our Pastor is appropriately paid for the ministry that he does. And I certainly don’t dispute that we should, in fact, we could flip through the NT and support that we need too. However, I think that narrowing verse 6 down to simply taking care of your Pastor misses the contextual point of this chapter. Those who are teaching here aren’t necessarily the Pastor at all, they are the ones who are spiritual. Paul is speaking to mature Christians up until this point, and he will continue to address them going further. The key interpretation of verse 6 is for mature believers to stay active in the lives of those fallen brothers and to see them along in Christlikeness. This command is for the fallen brother to embrace the love that the spiritual brother has shown him, and fellowship together. There should be an open relationship between both parties, where they share in all that is good (the Word of God) and grow together as those who are equally the recipients of God’s grace.