

The Good News and the Church



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 6:1–10; Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 15:1; John 13:34; Luke 22:3.

MEMORY VERSE: “So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it. [Let us] try even harder to do good to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NIV).



We take the big things in life for ourselves and “plant” the leftovers.

“AT THE END OF HARVEST, some farmers chose to keep for themselves the biggest vegetables they had grown. They chose to plant seeds from the smallest vegetables for next year’s crops. But then something terrible happened. Instead of big harvests the next year, the farmers got small ones. Those farmers learned a very important law of life.

“They learned they could not keep the best things of life for themselves and use the leftovers for the seed. The law of life made it clear that the harvest was a result of the planting. Put in a lot and receive a lot. Put in little, receive little.

“We still do what these farmers did. We take the big things in life for ourselves and ‘plant’ the leftovers. And we think that this selfishness will be rewarded.”—Adapted, *International Student Fellowship Newsletter*, March 2007.

Paul uses this same rule of life in Galatians 6:1–10. He says members should not “say or do things that harm one another” (Galatians 5:15, NIV). Instead, the church should be a place where the Holy Spirit leads us to put others before ourselves. We are saved by what Jesus did for us on the cross. This fact should help us not to feel proud. And it should help us to be patient with others and to be kind and loving to them, too.

BRINGING THE FALLEN BACK TO GOD (Galatians 6:1)

Read Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15–17. What do Paul and Jesus say Christians should do when a believer does wrong?

We need to understand what kind of situation Paul is talking about in Galatians 6:1. The first word that helps us understand what Paul means is “caught” (NIRV). It means “to capture and not allow a person or thing to escape.” Paul uses the word “caught” in two different ways. First, the word can point to a situation in which a believer catches another believer doing something wrong. But “caught” also can mean being overtaken by a sin (read Proverbs 5:22, NET) that a believer normally would have chosen to avoid.

Paul’s word choice in Galatians shows he is talking about a sin that a person normally would not do. The word “sin” (NIRV) comes from the Greek word *paraptoma*. It does not mean a sin that someone sets out to do. Instead, it means a mistake or a stumble. It means to step in the wrong direction by accident. Also, Paul has just finished talking about “walking” in the Spirit. And so, this idea of walking helps us to understand what Paul means by stepping or stumbling in the wrong direction. Now, stepping in the wrong direction by accident does not excuse the mistake of the person who stumbles into sin. But Paul is not talking about people who set out to sin on purpose and have no sorrow for the wrong they do (1 Corinthians 5:1–5).

We should not punish, criticize, or turn from those who stumble into sin. Instead, we should bring them back to God. The NIRV says we should “correct” such persons. The word “correct” comes from the Greek word *katartizō*. It means “to mend or fix” or “to put back in order.” In the New Testament, *katartizō* is used to mean “mending” fishnets (Matthew 4:21, NET). And it also is used as a medical word in Greek literature to talk about setting a broken bone. We never would turn away from a believer who fell and broke a leg. So, we should not turn away from our brothers and sisters in Christ who stumble and fall. After all, we are all walking together on the path to God’s kingdom.

Often we are guilty of talking badly about someone with whom we are angry. Or we let our anger quietly grow inside us. Or we may even plan revenge. Instead, we should follow Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:15–17. But why do we so often do the opposite instead?



We should not turn away from our brothers and sisters in Christ who stumble and fall.

**BE CAREFUL NOT TO FALL INTO SIN
(1 Corinthians 10:12)**

**“Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’ ”
(2 Samuel 12:7, Nlrv).**

Paul warns us in Galatians 6:1–10 to guard our very lives to avoid falling into sin. This warning is very serious. The wording Paul uses in his warning shows his deep concern. The word translated as “be careful” (Nlrv) means “to look at carefully” or “to pay attention to.” (Read Romans 16:17 and Philippians 2:4 for other examples of how the word is translated.) So, Paul is saying, “Watch out! Or sin will take you by surprise.” Paul switches from talking to “brothers and sisters” in the first part of the verse to “you” (meaning just one person) in the last half of the verse. What this switch means is that Paul’s warning is for each person in the church.

Paul does not name the temptation he warns believers against. Maybe he does not have a certain sin in mind. Instead, he could be pointing believers to the danger of falling into the same sin they are trying to turn another person away from. At the same time, Paul’s words in Galatians 5:26 also warn against becoming “proud” (Nlrv). Paul warns believers not to feel that they are in some way better than the people whom they are bringing back to God.



Paul warns us to guard our lives to avoid falling into sin.

Read the warnings against feeling proud in 1 Corinthians 10:12; Matthew 26:34; and 2 Samuel 12:1–7. Why would Paul need to warn the Galatians against feeling they are better than others spiritually?

Feeling proud is one of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk. It makes us think we are somehow protected from falling into certain kinds of sin. The truth is that we are all fallen. We are born wanting to do the opposite of what God wants us to do. So, we must place ourselves under the power of God’s Spirit. He will save us from what is wrong. Otherwise, we could fall into just about any sin, depending on the situation. So, we must remember that without Christ we are helpless sinners. This thought helps us not to feel proud. And it helps us to feel more forgiving toward others who make mistakes.

How often have you criticized others for sins that one day you found yourself doing?

CARRYING HEAVY LOADS (Galatians 6:2–5)

Read Galatians 6:2–5. In these verses, what else does Paul tell the believers in Galatia to do? Read also Romans 15:1 and Matthew 7:12.

The word “load” in Galatians 6:2 comes from the Greek word *baros*. It means a heavy load someone had to carry for a long distance. Over time, *baros* became a word picture for any type of difficulty. For example, it could mean a long day’s work in the heat (Matthew 20:12). So, Paul tells us to “carry one another’s heavy loads” (Galatians 6:2, NIV). This command certainly includes being kind to people when they fall. But Paul’s idea of carrying a load means so much more. In fact, Paul’s command shows several spiritual truths about the Christian life. Let us look at them.

First, as Timothy George notes, “All Christians carry heavy loads. Some people carry the heavy load that comes from falling into sin. For others, their heavy load may be sickness of mind or body. Or perhaps it could be family troubles, not having a job, being attacked by demons, or something else. But no Christian has a life free from heavy loads.”—Adapted, *Galatians*, page 413.

Second, God does not mean for us to carry all our loads alone. But often we are better at helping others carry their loads than letting them help us carry ours. Paul speaks against such pride (Galatians 6:3). A proud heart refuses to accept it has needs and weaknesses. And our proud hearts prevent others from doing the work God has given them to do to help us.

Finally, God asks us to carry the loads of others. It is through our kindness to others that God’s love and comfort are shown. Paul gives an example of this kindness in 2 Corinthians 7:6. This verse shows how God comforted Paul through his friend and the good news this friend brought.

“Friendship is part of God’s plan for His people. In friendship, we carry one another’s loads.”—Adapted, John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, page 158.

What stops you from asking others for help? Is it a proud heart? Is it feeling ashamed of needing help? Or is it not being able to trust? Or is it that you feel you need no help? Why not find someone you trust and ask this person to help carry your load?



God asks us to carry the loads of others.

THE LAW OF CHRIST (Galatians 5:14)

Read Galatians 5:14; Galatians 6:2; John 13:34; and Matthew 22:34–40. Paul connects carrying a heavy spiritual load with obeying the law of Christ. What does Paul mean by “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, NIV)?

Paul uses the wording “the law of Christ” in Galatians 6:2. This wording in Greek is *ton nomon tou Christou*. Bible thinkers have come up with many possible meanings for it. Some of their ideas are wrong. For example, some thinkers believe that this wording is proof that the law of God given at Sinai has been replaced by a different law. That different law is the law of Christ. Others claim that the word “law” simply means a rule. (Read Romans 7:21.) And so, those who carry the loads of others are following Jesus’ example. The last example has some truth to it.

But the verses before and after Galatians 6:2 and also Galatians 5:14 show us something else. They show us that honoring the law of Christ means to obey His law through love. Paul showed earlier in his letter that the law of God was not destroyed by the coming of Christ. Instead, the law of God still has an important part in the Christian life today. Jesus taught the importance of the law during His work on earth. He also lived this truth His whole life here, even at His death. So, we must carry the loads of others. Then we will be following in the footsteps of Jesus. And we will be obeying the law of love.

We also find what seems like a disagreement between Galatians 6:2 and Galatians 6:5. But this problem is easily solved. How? By realizing that Paul is using two different words to describe two different situations. We already have seen that the word for “loads” in Galatians 6:2 is *baros*. It means a heavy load that must be carried for a long distance. In Galatians 6:5, Paul uses the word *phortion*. This word can mean a ship’s cargo, a soldier’s backpack, or even an unborn child inside its mother. Cargoes and backpacks can be set down. But not unborn babies. This example shows that there are some burdens that no human can carry for us. For example, no one can carry another person’s guilt, suffering, or death. We must lean only on God for help with these things (Matthew 11:28–30).

Why must you give to the Lord the things that you cannot carry? How can you learn to do that?



We must carry the loads of others. Then we will be following in the footsteps of Jesus.

PLANTING AND GATHERING THE CROP (Galatians 6:6–8)

In Galatians 6:7, Paul says, “You [cannot] outsmart God” (NirV). The word “outsmart” comes from the Greek word *muk-terizo*. It means “to turn up one’s nose in scorn at someone.” In the Old Testament, this word often is used to describe how poorly God’s messengers were treated (2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 20:7). Once it is even used to describe how God’s own people were “making fun” of Him (Ezekiel 8:17, NirV).

Paul’s point is that people may ignore God. They may break His law. But they cannot fool Him. In the end, they will pay the price for the wrong they choose to do.

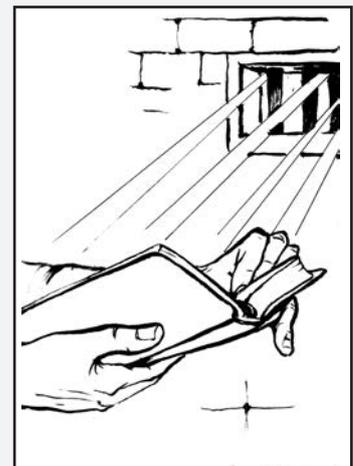
What does Paul mean in Galatians 6:8? What examples of Bible characters can you find who “planted” sin in the flesh or “planted” goodness in the Spirit? (For example, read Acts 5:1–5; Luke 22:3; Daniel 1:8; and Matthew 4:1.)

Paul’s word picture about planting and gathering the crop is not new. But what is special is how he uses it. He uses it to draw attention to his earlier words about the flesh and the Spirit. James D. G. Dunn helps explain the meaning of Paul’s word picture: “We are free to choose. But we are not free to choose the results of our choice.”—Adapted, *Galatians*, page 330.

God does not always free us from the results of the sins we do on this earth. But we should not lose hope. We can be happy that God has forgiven our sins and adopted us. So, we should take advantage of the opportunities before us to do those things that will bring others to God.

Galatians 6:10 shows, “There are two parts to what we call Christian ethics. [Ethics is the study of what is the right and wrong way to behave.] The first part concerns our responsibility to the world at large: ‘So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it.’ But the second part is more particular, ‘[Let us] try even harder to do good to the family of believers.’ Paul bases his appeal to do good to others on the fact that all persons everywhere are made in the likeness of God. So each one is precious to Him. But sometimes Christians forget this fact. And then they treat people badly for being different from themselves.”—Adapted, Timothy George, *Galatians*, pages 427, 428.

You are planting either for good or evil. Look at your life. What kind of crop are you going to gather?



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God’s Spirit gives the mind power over evil. But what if some refuse to accept the Spirit’s help? Then they will gather a crop of sin. The Spirit will have less power to stop them from planting seeds of disobedience. And His warnings will have less strength over their minds. After a time, they will lose a fear of God. Then they will plant sin and gather a crop of death. The harvest of the sinful seed they planted will ripen. And they will have no respect for God’s law. As a result, the heart of flesh becomes the heart of stone. The heart that turns away from the truth shows how sinful it is. In the days before the Flood, men planted seeds of evil. And crime and rough force ruled in the world.

“All should be wise about how the soul is destroyed. God gives enough light and proof to help us know right from wrong. But God does not force us to accept truth. He leaves us free to choose good or evil. Suppose a person rejects God’s light and chooses evil. Then he or she will choose it more easily the second time. And the third. Each time it becomes easier to withdraw from God and stand on the side of Satan. This path will lead him or her to believe that lies are truth. Turning away from God produces such a terrible harvest.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1112.



“Turning away from God produces such a terrible harvest.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Suppose a fellow believer falls into sin. What does it mean to bring him or her back to God? How does the mistake made affect the process of bringing him or her back? Does bringing this person back mean everything will be the same as before? Explain.
- ② There are some loads people must carry on their own (Galatians 6:5). So, how does a believer decide when he or she should help someone?
- ③ How does your church live up to Paul’s advice in Galatians 6? How can you make a difference in helping your church do so?

SUMMARY: A Christlike spirit shown in the church is a sign that God is among His people. God’s Spirit can be seen in the way we forgive those who sin and in the way that we bring them back to God. God’s Spirit also is shown in how we help one another through difficult times. And He is seen in the kindness we show to one another and to unbelievers.