

LIVING FREE IN CHRIST—

PART III: FREE TO SHARE BURDENS

(GAL 6:1–18)

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I. Introduction

- A. Please turn to Gal 6:1.
- B. While you are turning ...

In the popular comic strip "Peanuts," Lucy asks Charlie Brown, "Why are we here on earth?" He replies, "To make others happy." She ponders this for a moment and then asks, "Then why are the others here?"¹

II. Exposition

A. Background

- 1. We are now at the end of the letter to Galatia.
- 2. Paul has been telling us how to live free in Christ.
 - a. Last week, he will begin to explore the meaning of the freedom that we have in Christ (Gal 5:13–6:10).
 - 1) We are free to love (Gal 5:13–15).
 - 2) We are free to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16–26)
 - b. This week, Paul will conclude by explaining that we are free to bear each other's burdens and share with each other (Gal 6:1–18).

B. Living free in Christ (Gal 5:1–6:10)—Part III: Free to share burdens (Gal 6:1–18)

1. Free to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:1–5)

a. Restoring a sinning brother (Gal 6:1)

^{6:1} 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 (Gal 6:1).

- 1) Paul discusses our freedom to bear one another's burdens.
- 2) He begins by teaching that those who are truly spiritual should restore a sinning fellow Christian with a gentle attitude.
 - a) He addresses them as "brethren" indicating that he is confident of their faith.
 - b) The Gk. verb translated "caught" means "to ascertain someth[ing] by surprise, *detect, overtake, surprise.*"²
 - i) One translation of this is "discovered" (NET). Another translation is "caught" (CJB, NAB, NJB).
 - ii) The verb is in the aorist tense, i.e., a snapshot like action in the past.
 - c) The Gk. word translated "trespass" employs the "imagery of one making a false step so as to lose footing: a violation of moral standards, *offense, wrongdoing, sin.*"³
 - d) Like an embarrassing picture, the fellow Christian is caught at just the moment of taking a misstep and falling into sin; either they are surprised by their failure, or others are.⁴

- 3) The manner in which the sinning Christian is restored is important.
- a) That is, in restoring the sinning Christian, our manner should be a gentle attitude.
 - b) There is a subtle pun here on Paul's part; if we are spiritual, our spirit will be gentle. After all, one of the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness (Gal 5:23).
 - c) The Gk. word translated "gentleness" means "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.*"⁵
 - d) This was no doubt in marked contrast with the condemnation of the legalists.
- 4) Paul points out that we must look to ourselves so that we too will not be tempted and fall into sin.
- a) The Gk. verb translated "looking" (*skopeō*) means "to pay careful attention to, *look (out) for, notice.*"⁶
 - i) The verb is in the present tense indicating continual action.
 - ii) One translation is "Pay close attention to yourselves" (NET).
 - iii) Another is "keeping an eye on yourselves" (CJB).

b) This careful attention to our own attitudes and weaknesses is so that we will not be tempted.

i) In this context, the Gk. word translated "be tempted" means "to entice to improper behavior."⁷

ii) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

b. Bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2–3)

² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Gal 6:2–3).

1) We are to help our brothers and sisters bear life's heavy burdens.

a) The word "bear" is a unifying theme in these last verses: we are to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2); "each one will bear his own load" (Gal 6:5); and "I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17).

b) The verb is in the present tense indicating continual or habitual action.

i) Wuest translates this, "be constantly bearing" (NTET).

ii) Williams translates, "Practice bearing one another's burdens" (NTLP).

c) The Gk. word translated here "burdens" refers to the "experience of someth[ing] that is particularly oppressive."⁸

- d) Contrast this with the attitude of the legalist that Jesus addressed when He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46).⁹
- 2) Bearing one another's heavy burdens fulfills Christ's command to love one another.
- a) Jesus commanded us, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34; see also John 15:12).
 - b) The Apostle John referred to the same command, "And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).
 - c) This is the one stipulation of the new covenant, the one written on our hearts.
 - i) God told Jeremiah, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it" (Jer 31:33).
 - ii) However, in a grant covenant like the new covenant, the stipulations are not something that you do to earn the blessing; the blessing has already been given. The commands are the grateful response of the recipient.

- iii) We are not "without the law of God but under the law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:21).
 - iv) Therefore, our grateful response to the free gift of salvation is love, first for God and then for each other.
- 3) Those who think that they are too good to be involved with a sinning fellow-believer are self-deceived as to their importance.¹⁰
- a) This is a first-class condition, i.e., if-and-it-is-the-case.
 - b) Paul asked the Corinthians, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor 4:7).
 - c) The Gk. word translated "deceives" means "deceive one's own mind."¹¹ Paul adds the word "himself" to this.
 - d) Thus, Paul makes it very clear that this person fools no one but himself.

c. Bearing one's own burden (Gal 6:4–5)

⁴ 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. ⁵ For each one will bear his own load (Gal 6:4–5).

- 1) The cure to this self-deception is to self-examine our works.
 - a) The Gk. word translated "examine" means "to make a critical examination of someth[ing] to determine genuineness."¹²

i) Paul is speaking, not of salvation, which is "not as a result of works" (Eph 2:9), but of rewards.

ii) Paul wrote the Corinthians:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor 3:10–15).

iii) We should test our life's work before it is tested at the Judgment seat of Christ for eternal rewards.¹³

iv) This has been translated, "Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else" (NLT).¹⁴

b) This feeling of superiority comes from comparing ourselves to each other.

i) There is always someone worse, at least to our perception.¹⁵

- ii) Paul explained to the Corinthians, "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding" (2 Cor 10:12).
 - c) *The real standard is the Lord Jesus Christ before whom we all fall short.*¹⁶
- 2) We each have our own responsibilities for which we are personally answerable to God.
- a) The Gk. word translated "load" refers to "a load which one is expected to bear. It was used as a military term for a man's pack or a soldier's kit."¹⁷
 - b) This is a different Gk. word than the word translated "burdens" in verse 2.¹⁸
 - c) This has been translated, "Because every man is responsible for his part of the work" (BBE). Another translation has, "Assume your own responsibility" (GW).
 - d) *Our focus should be on what God has for us to do, not what He has others doing.*

2. Free to share (Gal 6:6–10)

a. Sharing with teachers (Gal 6:6)

⁶ The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him (Galatians 6:6).

- 1) Paul encourages the Galatians to support those who teach the Word of God to them.
- 2) The legalists may have alienated the Galatians from their teachers who had instructed them about grace.¹⁹
- 3) The Gk. word translated "share" (*koinōneō*) is "denoting common participation *share, have in common, take part with someone.*"²⁰

b. Sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7–8)

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ 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 (Gal 6:7–8).

- 1) Paul says that we are deceived and are mocking God if we think that we can ignore the principle that whatever we plant, we will harvest.
 - a) Gk. grammar indicates that they were being deceived, and Paul orders them to stop.²¹ Wuest translates, "Stop leading yourselves astray" (NTET).
 - b) The Gk. word translated "mocked" means "*turn up the nose at, treat with contempt.*"²²
 - i) One translation has, "God will not be made a fool" (NET).

- ii) Another translation has, "You can never make a fool out of God" (GW).
 - iii) This has also been translated, "Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant" (NLT).
- c) This is a well-known proverb.²³
- i) It is in the OT, "According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it" (Job 4:8), and "For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind" (Hos 8:7).
 - ii) Paul uses it elsewhere, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6).
 - iii) Plato has Socrates say, "What harvest do you suppose his oratory will reap thereafter from the seed he has sown?"²⁴
 - iv) Even Aristotle used it, "And you did sow shamefully and did reap miserably."²⁵
 - v) We deceive ourselves if we think that we can avoid the consequences of our actions.

2) Whoever sows actions that are intended to gratify the sinful nature will harvest destruction, decay, and death. However, whoever sows actions that gratify the Holy Spirit will harvest full enjoyment of eternal life.²⁶

a) This has been translated, "Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit" (NLT).

b) Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ presently have eternal life. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

c) However, you can have a more abundant experience of eternal life starting now. Jesus also said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

c. Doing good to all people (Gal 6:9–10)

⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰ 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 (Gal 6:9–10).

1) Paul encourages the Galatians to not become discouraged in doing good, because there will be a harvest if they do not give up.

- a) The Gk. word translated "loose heart" means "to lose one's motivation in continuing a desirable pattern of conduct or activity, *lose enthusiasm, be discouraged*."²⁷
- b) The Gk. word translated "due time" (*kairos*) is used "as a specific and decisive point, often divinely allotted."²⁸
- c) The Gk. word translated "grow weary" means "be exhausted in strength, *become weary, give out*."²⁹
- d) This has been translated, "So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up" (HCSB).
- e) *God has strategic time for success, and we must not give up before it arrives.*

2) Paul concludes that, as we have God-given opportunities, we should do good to all, and especially to fellow believers.

- a) The Gk. word translated "opportunity" is *kairos*, the same word used in the previous verse.³⁰
- b) These opportunities are divine appointments to do good.
- c) Our priority is to help our fellow believers, but our help should extend to all.

3. Closing (Gal 6:11–18)

a. Paul's final exhortation in his own hand (Gal 6:11–16)

1) Paul's large letters (Gal 6:11)

¹¹ **See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand (Gal 6:11).**

- a) At this point, Paul took the pen from the scribe to sign the letter.
- b) This was Paul's standard procedure to guard against forgeries (2 Thess 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21).
- c) There have been many speculations as to Paul's meaning here.³¹
 - i) Some have speculated that Paul had an eye disease that required him to write large to see the letters.
 - ii) Others think that Paul wrote large simply because he was not a professional scribe.
 - iii) Perhaps that best suggestion is that large letters were a form of emphasis like boldface type.
 - iv) In that case, Paul is indicating the importance of what he is writing.

2) The Judaizers' motives (Gal 6:12–13)

- a) Avoiding persecution because of the cross (Gal 6:12)

¹² Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ (Gal 6:12).

- i) Paul concludes by examining the Judaizers' motives. He explains that, in spite of their desire to look good, they have two unworthy motives.
- ii) First, they wish to avoid persecution.

- (a) Their fellow Jews would have no objection to Christianity if converts had to be circumcised and keep the law.³² Of course, as Paul has already said, "If righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal 2:21).
- (b) The Romans considered Judaism a lawful religion, but were unsure about Christianity occasionally persecuting it. The more Jewish that they appeared the less likely they were to be persecuted.
- (c) Therefore, the Judaizers avoided persecution by pushing circumcision.
- (d) However, the cross is a "stumbling block (Gk. *skandalon*)" (Gal 5:11).

b) Boasting about the Galatians flesh (Gal 6:13)

¹³ For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh (Gal 6:13).

- i) The second thing that motivates the Judaizers is the desire to boast about how many converts that they had made.
- ii) Paul points out that the Judaizers are themselves not able to keep the Law.

(a) Nevertheless, they are imposing that burden on the Galatians merely so that they can brag about their results.

(b) This has been translated, "They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples" (NLT).

3) Boasting in the cross (Gal 6:14)

¹⁴ But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal 6:14).

a) Paul exclaims that he should never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

b) He explains that, as a result of the cross, he and the world are dead to each other.

i) Phillips paraphrases this, "The world is a dead thing to me and I am a dead man to the world" (NTME).

ii) Paul said earlier, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20).

iii) Paul wrote to the Philippians:

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:2–9).

iv) *All of Paul's past life and successes in Judaism were a loss to him. All that counted was Christ.*

4) Neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision (Gal 6:15–16)

¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Gal 6:15–16).

a) Paul repeats his earlier statement that circumcision and uncircumcision are both meaningless.

i) He said earlier, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything" (Gal 5:6). The repetition underscores the importance that Paul places on this.

ii) Paul states that what matters is a new creation.

(a) Paul will tell the Corinthians, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17).

(b) As Paul said earlier, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

b) Paul prays a blessing on those who hold to that standard and on believing Jews.

i) The phrase "the Israel of God" does not indicate that the Church has replaced Israel (see Rom 11).

ii) Instead, it refers to Jewish believers.³³

b. Paul's Marks (Gal 6:17)

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus (Gal 6:17).

1) Paul says that he should never have to vindicate his apostleship and message again because he is branded with the marks of Jesus.

a) This has been translated, "From now on, don't make any trouble for me!" (GW).

b) The Gk. word translated "brand-marks" is *stigmata*.

i) Brands were applied to slaves, soldiers, and captives.³⁴

ii) This is not some mystical recreation of the wounds of Christ such as has been claimed for St. Francis of Assisi.

iii) Paul is referring to the scars that he received by persecution and hardship.³⁵

(a) Williams translates, "Let nobody trouble me after this, for I carry on my body the scars that mark me as Jesus' slave" (NTLP).

(b) Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep (2 Cor 11:23–25).

(c) In Lystra in Galatia, "they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts 14:19).

2) Wiersbe comments:

The contrast with the legalists is plain to see: "The Judaizers want to mark your flesh and brag about you, but I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus Christ—for His glory." What a rebuke! "If your religious celebrities have any scars to show for the glory of Christ, then let them be shown. Otherwise—stop bothering me!"³⁶

3) Paul had paid the price and should not have to prove himself any more.

c. Closing benediction (Gal 6:18)

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen (Gal 6:18).

1) Paul ends as he began (Gal 1:3) wishing the Galatians "grace" (*charis*, "unmerited favor") from the source of the "Lord Jesus Christ."

2) Paul calls these foolish Galatians that he has been so stern with brothers.

3) He has shown them tough love because he cares.

4) Nevertheless, he is certain that they are fellow believers in Jesus Christ.

III. Applications

A. The mark of true spirituality is gentle restoration of those who fall.

1. We must be careful lest we fall, too.

2. We must not consider ourselves too good to help them.

B. We are free to help others carry life's heavy burdens.

1. Nevertheless, we must carry our own responsibilities.

2. God does not compare our works against others when He assigns rewards.

C. We are free to share with others.

1. We should do good to all.

2. We will reap what we sow.

3. We will be rewarded if we do not give up.

D. No amount of Law keeping can ever earn God's approval.

1. We are saved through grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone plus nothing.

2. We live by faith in the Son of God who gave Himself for us.

- ¹ Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:721.
- ² BDAG 872. See also Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:164–65; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432; Earle, "Galatians," *WMNT* 285.
- ³ BDAG 770. See also Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:165; Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:315; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432.
- ⁴ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:999.
- ⁵ BDAG 861.
- ⁶ BDAG 931. See also Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1000; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432.
- ⁷ BDAG 792–93.
- ⁸ BDAG 167. See also Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432; Earle, "Galatians," *WMNT* 285–86.
- ⁹ Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:721.
- ¹⁰ Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:168; Boice, "Galatians," *EBC* 10:502.
- ¹¹ MM 675. See also Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:315.
- ¹² BDAG 255–56. See also Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:168; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432.
- ¹³ Wilkin, "Galatians," *GNTC* 2:853.
- ¹⁴ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1000.
- ¹⁵ Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:722.
- ¹⁶ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1000.
- ¹⁷ Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432; Earle, "Galatians," *WMNT* 285–86; Martin et al., "Galatians," *ZIBBCNT* 3:293.
- ¹⁸ Campbell, "Galatians," *BKCNT* 609–10; Boice, "Galatians," *EBC* 10:502; Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:722.
- ¹⁹ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1001.
- ²⁰ Friberg et al., *ALGNT* 225.
- ²¹ The Gk. is *mē planasthe*. When *mē* is used with a present imperative verb (*planasthe*), it means "to bring to an end a condition now existing" (BDAG 644–46). See also Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:316.
- ²² BDAG 660; Friberg et al., *ALGNT* 267. Horace uses the Lat. phrase *naso suspendis* (Horace, *Sat.* 1.6.5; 2.8.64; *Epist.* 1.19.45). See also Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1001; Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:172; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432; Campbell, "Galatians," *BKCNT* 610.
- ²³ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1001; Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:172; Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:316; Keener, "Galatians," *BBCNT* 536.
- ²⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 260c–d.
- ²⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.3, 4.
- ²⁶ Wilkin, "Galatians," *GNTC* 2:854.
- ²⁷ BDAG 272. See also Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:173.
- ²⁸ Friberg et al., *ALGNT* 212. See also Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 432; Boice, "Galatians," *EBC* 10:504.
- ²⁹ BDAG 306. See also Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:173.
- ³⁰ Boice, "Galatians," *EBC* 10:504.
- ³¹ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1002; Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:317; Earle, "Galatians," *WMNT* 286; Keener, "Galatians," *BBCNT* 536; Martin et al., "Galatians," *ZIBBCNT* 3:294; Campbell, "Galatians," *BKCNT* 610; Boice, "Galatians," *EBC* 10:505–6; Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:724–25.
- ³² Martin et al., "Galatians," *ZIBBCNT* 3:294.
- ³³ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1003; Keener, "Galatians," *BBCNT* 537; Wilkin, "Galatians," *GNTC* 2:857; Campbell, "Galatians," *BKCNT* 611.
- ³⁴ Vincent, *WSNT* 2:1003–4; Wuest, "Galatians," *WWSGNT* 1:179–80; Robertson, "Galatians," *WPNT* 4:318–19; Rogers et al., "Galatians," *NLEKGNT* 433; Earle, "Galatians," *WMNT* 286; Martin et al., "Galatians," *ZIBBCNT* 3:295.
- ³⁵ Wilkin, "Galatians," *GNTC* 2:857; Campbell, "Galatians," *BKCNT* 611.
- ³⁶ Wiersbe, "Galatians," *BECNT* 1:727.