

# Study 7: Galatians Chapter 6

## **Introduction**

Paul now concludes the letter, with a very positive direction and encouragement to the Galatians, and quite specific instructions as to how they should interact with each other.

But before he does that, he concludes his arguments on the Law and Christ.

## **Body of the Study**

*How does 6:3 reconcile with 6:5?*

*How should the teacher and students interact?*

*How are we to do good to others?*

*The conclusion*

*What are the concluding remarks that add emphasis to the letter?*

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

- *What are some of the practical ways that we can “bear one another’s burdens”?*
- *There was division amongst the church – how was such division to be resolved?*
  
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read the whole book again in a single sitting.

## Notes for study 7: Chapter 6

### Introduction

Paul now concludes the letter, with a very positive direction and encouragement to the Galatians, and quite specific instructions as to how they should interact with each other.

### Body of the Study

#### ***How does 6:3 reconcile with 6:5?***

The closing parts of chapter 5 have dealt with the “*Works of the Flesh vs the Fruit of the Spirit*”. What Paul does next is to point out that we cannot live a spiritual life in isolation of one another. It is very well to have grown spiritually so that we exhibit by nature the Spiritual characteristics, but unless we realise that the purpose of those characteristics are to enable us to interact with our brothers and sisters (and those outside of Christ) then we have missed to point.

Hypothetically, we could grow in isolation of each other and develop our spiritual character. But the problem occurs when we then interact with others. And that appears to be what had been happening in Galatia. The factionism had continued, and people were trying to be “too independent”. They were not allowing others to help them, or even when they saw others in trouble they were not going out of their way, or putting themselves to any trouble to help out. Paul says that this is not the way it ought to be.

So, what Paul says is that we need to have care one for another – we must bear one another’s burdens (compare 1 Cor 12:12-27; vs 26 particularly). We need to care for one another, and share with our joys and our sorrows, and help when we need help.

But at the same time, that does not mean that we should just stand aside and let someone else do all of the work. That is not the idea at all – and so Paul says that we must each carry our own share of the load – *bear our own burdens*. This is not a contradiction at all, but rather complimentary statements as to how we need to behave and react with each other.

Paul adds to this (actually begins the thought) by saying that “...*if a man is overtaken in a fault, the spiritual ones should restore him...*” (6:1). Clearly there was factionism happening in the Galatian churches. Most factionism results in or from in-fighting between members, and gets more and more entrenched the longer it goes. When this happens, everyone looks at the faults in the other party, but are usually blind to their own faults. This is the time for others to step in (to mediate), and those who should do this are “...*those who are spiritual...*”. It may be that Paul is referring to those who have some special spiritual gifts – but then what should be done to solve the problem after the gifts had ceased? Rather, it requires a mature christian who is very spiritually minded (and a good knowledge of God’s word, so that he can solve the “technical problems”) to step in and resolve the issues impartially. This is exactly the role of the elders, and perhaps did not say that the elders needed to resolve the issue here because they might have been involved in it. (There most certainly were elders in the Galatian churches, because Paul and Barnabas appointed them on the return leg of the first journey – Acts 14:23).

#### ***How should the teacher and students interact?***

Paul uses the word *Koinoneito* (to have fellowship with) to describe the relationship between the two. In the context of the problems in Galatia, it could suggest that there was a problem with some – possibly with the elders, as mentioned previously.

Importantly, there needs to be great interaction between the two, so that the teachers understand the students, and the students understand the teachers.

Some writers suggest that Paul has in mind right through this section (verses 6 to 10) the use of money, and in this particular sense, the fellowship that the students have with the teacher by way of financial support.

The second area to which Paul seeks to apply the life of the Spirit in a practical way is the use of money; indeed, few things more clearly disclose the priorities of the heart than this. While many commentators hesitate to relate this entire section to the use of money, and while it is true that the section as a whole goes beyond that topic, at least three factors indicate that Paul was thinking primarily of money. First, the phrase "do good to all" (v. 10) is certainly a euphemism for giving alms, so that a concern for financial matters never entirely leaves Paul's mind. Second, v. 7 is a proverb that Paul used on at least one other occasion to encourage generous giving (2Co 9:6). Finally, giving was important to Paul at this time, for the collection for the Jerusalem poor was part of his policy and the admonition to proceed with it was fresh in his mind as a result of the Jerusalem council (Gal 2:10). This passage may even be alluding to the collection.

Three uses of money are mentioned: (1) the support of the teacher in a Christian congregation, (2) the use of money to build up the life of the Spirit rather than to feed the flesh, and (3) the spending of money to help others, particularly Christians. The principle that ties all three points together is that enunciated in the proverb: reaping is in proportion to sowing. (NIV Bible Commentary)

But it is not absolutely clear that this is what Paul has in mind, and the practical interaction between the teacher and student can just as adequately be applied.

- If we sow little (by way of our teaching) we will also reap little (vs 7&8),
- Do not grow weary in doing good (teachers can get weary of having to prepare lessons that they think no-one is interested in),
- The rewards will be bountiful if we do not give up.

As the teacher takes the students and trains them towards maturity, the rewards come by seeing others develop (and often exceed the capability of the teacher), to the point that they can teach others also (2 Tim 2:2).

### ***How are we to do good to others?***

Whatever opportunities that we have, we should use them as opportunities to do good. But Paul adds that we should be particular concerning those who are Christians ("*...of the household of faith...*") Whilst we have a general responsibility – as a member of the family of man – to do good to others, we have an enhanced responsibility to those who are members of the church.

This is not to say (in any way!) that we should do good deeds in order to win favour from God. We are already in God's favour – we have become that way because of the sacrifice of Jesus, and because of our faith in Him (3:26,29).

But with the sonship (the inheritance that we have from Christ) comes responsibility. The prime responsibility that we have is to teach the gospel to others, but it doesn't end there. We also have the responsibility to help others in practical and physical ways. We do this, not to earn God's favour, but because we have God's favour – because we are sons.

If Paul had in mind the financial support of others (teachers), then it is quite clear that whilst the Christians have the responsibility to financially help those on the world, then they have a greater responsibility to support those who are Christians and teaching the word of the Lord.

### ***The conclusion***

In his usual style, Paul concludes the main part of the letter, but still continues to emphasise his teaching in the conclusion.

His comment “...see what large letters I have written with my own hand...” (6:11) can be taken in either of two ways. It could mean “see how big my handwriting is”, or it could mean “see how long a letter I have written to you”.

Unlike many of Paul’s epistles, Galatians does not appear to have been written by a scribe, but rather by Paul himself. For him to say “see how long a letter I have written to you” does not exactly fit with what we know about Paul’s letters – Romans, the two Corinthian letters, and Ephesians are all longer than the Galatian letter. So, the emphasis is not on the length of the letter, but rather on the fact that Paul wrote it himself.

Equally, if he was saying “see how big my handwriting is”, then it would suggest that perhaps his *thorn in the flesh* (2 Cor 12:7) was his poor eyesight. Both interpretations of Paul’s comment would suggest that his poor eyesight might have been a problem.

### ***What are the concluding remarks that add emphasis to the letter?***

We have discussed the comparison between the introduction and the conclusion in study 2. Paul adds the conclusion as emphasis to what he has written in the letter. A synopsis of what he says is:

- The Judaisers are trying to make a good showing – but it is fleshly [Remember what he has said about the works of the flesh?]
- The reason that they are compelling you to be circumcised is so that they might escape the persecution from the Jews [Compare that with the things that Paul suffered because of the cross – and many of them amongst the Galatians!].
- The Judaisers compel you to be circumcised, yet they do not keep the Law themselves [Because no-one could keep it, except the Lord].
- They just want to glory (to the Jews) about you [But Paul says that I do not glory in anything except the cross of Christ – vs 14].
- I have totally set my self apart from the world – it has been crucified to me, and I to it [compare 2:20].
- It doesn’t matter whether we have been crucified or not – what matters is whether we belong to Christ [He has dealt with this in detail in chapters 3 and 4, and parts of 5].
- When we walk the way that God wants us to, Paul wants us to have the peace and blessings of God – whether we are Gentiles, or even the Jews of Israel.

The letter finally concludes by Paul requesting that he not have further trouble like this again. The language expresses that of a tired crusader – who bears the marks of the battle upon his body. But the battle is not over for Paul yet. He is still on the third journey when he wrote Galatians, and is about to go to Jerusalem where he will be arrested, then imprisoned in Caesarea, then taken as prisoner to Rome and imprisoned again. Following his release from Rome, he then travels on another missionary journey for several years before being taken captive to Rome again and put to death. [For a detailed study of the life of Paul, see my study series “The Life of Paul” which includes details of his latter life].