

Galatians 6:1-18 ~ Discussion Questions

1. How easily do you share your time and skills with others? How do you feel when you offer to serve but are turned down? How do you feel when you aren't thanked for going out of your way to serve somebody?
2. What is the best approach to helping a Christian brother caught in sin? Paul says "you who are spiritual" should help. To whom does this refer? (6:1, 4:6)
3. What are three dangers of correcting someone else's sin or wrong? (6:1)
4. Do you want the approval of others? Is it bad to take pride in yourself? (6:4-5, 5:20, Philippians 2:3)
5. Why is it important to have Christian friends? Wouldn't it be easier to live as a hermit or monk?
6. What do you think Paul is saying in Verse 6:6? (1 Corinthians 9:7-14, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
7. Do you believe that you reap what you sow? (6:7-9, Job 4:8)
8. What does the word "therefore" (or "so then") indicate in Verse 6:10?
9. In Verse 6:11, Paul says, "see what large letters I use..." What is the meaning of this?
10. Why were the Judaizers trying to compel the Christians to be circumcised? (6:12)
11. In your own words, what's the meaning of v. 6:14 – May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Jeremiah 9:24, 1 Corinthians 1:31)
12. Often glossed over, v. 6:15 is one of the richest theological statements in the letter. How so?

Galatians 6:1-18 ~ Leader's Guide

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2. What is the best approach to helping a Christian brother caught in sin? Paul says "you who are spiritual" should help. To whom does this refer? (6:1, 4:6)

This is a very general maxim about helping others who have given in to a temptation or have (or are) sinned in some way. Some people interpret "you who are spiritual" to mean a specific group in the Galatian churches. But earlier in the letter Paul has insisted that all Christians have received the Spirit (3:1-5, 4:6), so his instruction to correct others applies to all Christians. The NRSV has a good translation of this phrase:

Galatians 6:1 – My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, *you who have received the Spirit* should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

Paul said we all have received the spirit: Galatians 4:6 – Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Paul's concern for the erring believer is paralleled in James 5:19-20 and partially in Matthew 18:15.

James 5:19-20 – ¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

3. What are three dangers of correcting someone else's sin or wrong? (6:1)

Paul says one danger is that you may also be tempted to sin. For example, if someone tells you a nasty little secret about someone else, you may say to your friend, "you know, you really shouldn't gossip about Bill like that." But then you get to thinking, "that's a really juicy little morsel; I've got to tell someone about it." Or if a friend is looking at a picture in a porn magazine or on the Internet, you may approach him to suggest, "hey, that's not really good for you," but then he says, "yeah, but take a look at this. You've never seen a pair of gazebos like this before in your life."

The second danger of correcting someone else is that you get to feel that you're better than he is. I know a woman who grew up in a home with a mother who was an alcoholic, kind of unusual, and today she is a persistent crusader against drugs and alcohol. I have the utmost respect for her she sets a good example, she's not in your face about it, and she has a powerful testimony of the problems that alcohol can cause in a family. But this woman has an unrelated but serious problem of her own and any efforts to bring it to her attention, even very gently and lovingly, are met with an attitude of "that's not important; look at all these things I do; I'm better than that."

The third danger is putting a barrier between you and the other person. Of making him reject Christ and Christians.

4. Do you want the approval of others? Is it bad to take pride in yourself? (6:4-5, 5:20, Philippians 2:3)

Did you give the “Christian” answer of “no?” If so, you’re probably deceiving yourself because everyone needs a certain amount of approval from others. If you go out of your way to win honors or win popularity because of your own selfish ambition, that’s bad, that leads to being conceited and it also leads to you feeling envious of others who are more popular or have receive more honors than you. Certainly, we should look to God for approval and feel absolutely wonderful about his love for us, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t also need some earthly approval and help from others. This works two ways: just as you need approval and help from time to time, don’t forget that others do too, so be generous offering approval and help to others.

Selfish ambition is certainly not good and is the mortal enemy of unity and harmony in the church. Indeed in the previous chapter Paul lists “selfish ambition” among the “acts of a sinful nature” (5:20)

Philippians 2:3-4 – ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

“Value others above yourselves” does not mean that everyone else is superior or more talented than you, but that Christian love sees others as worthy of preferential treatment.

Concerning pride, Paul says that if you test your own actions and evaluate it as a job well done, you can take pride in it and won’t have to (and shouldn’t) compare yourself to anyone else. The emphasis is on personal responsibility.

Unfortunately, you often look at the flaws in someone else to feel better about yourself or maybe just for reassurance that you’re doing okay. When you’re tempted to compare yourself with someone else, why not compare yourself with Jesus for a real dose of humility. His example will inspire you to do your very best and his loving acceptance will comfort you when you fall short.

5. Why is it important to have Christian friends? Wouldn’t it be easier to live as a hermit or monk?

You need someone to gently point out your sins. Someone with the same Godly values and standards that you have, not living by earthly values. Someone to give you encouragement and help. Someone that you can encourage and help. Encouragement and praise is just as important, perhaps even more, than rebuke and correction.

No Christian should ever think that he is totally independent and doesn’t need help from others, and no one should feel excused from the task of helping others. The body of Christ the church functions only when all the members work together for the common good.

6. What do you think Paul is saying in Verse 6:6? (1 Corinthians 9:7-14, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Verse 6:6 is a paragraph of its own with an idea not related to those that proceed or

those that follow. In 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy the right of preachers to be supported financially is asserted. But this is rather different. It refers in general terms to the support (including financial support) to be given by those under instruction in the faith to their teachers. Not just in a formal school or college, but in general, students should take care of the material needs of their teachers. It is easy to receive the benefit of good Biblical teaching and then take our spiritual leaders for granted, ignoring their physical and financial needs. We should care for our teachers with a generous spirit and show them honor and appreciation for all they have done.

7. Do you believe that you reap what you sow? (6:7-9, Job 4:8)

It is a proverbial saying that you reap what you sow. If you plant corn, I think you'd be surprised to find a field of pumpkins five months later. Likewise, every action has a result. If you gossip, you're going to lose friends. If you lie, you're going to be known as a man of no integrity. Even though your sins and wrong may not be punished here, today, you can be sure that God is watching and there is no escape from His justice.

This saying was well-known to Paul's audience as a variation of it was in one of the earliest books of the Bible:

Job 4:8 – As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

But Paul takes this old saying and gives it a theological emphasis. In v. 8, he draws a sharp contrast between the flesh or sinful nature and the Spirit; in effect this is a summary of 5:16-25. In 5:21, Paul speaks of inheriting the "kingdom of God;" here of reaping "eternal life." The first focuses on the realm that will be inherited (as Israel will inherit the promised land); the second focuses on the blessed life that will be enjoyed in that realm.

8. What does the word "therefore" (or "so then") indicate in Verse 6:10?

It forms a closing (one commentator says "bookend") for the series of exhortations that started at v. 5:13. The encouragement to the Galatian Christians to work for the good of all is a bold vision. The churches in Galatia were tiny minorities in the societies in which they lived. They had their own internal tensions and conflicts. But here they are urged to strive for the well-being of all without distinction. That special concern should be shown for the "family of believers" (or household of faith) is understandable.

9. In Verse 6:11, Paul says, "see what large letters I use..." What is the meaning of this?

Up to this point, Paul had dictated the letter and now he was writing the closing in his own hand. He did this with his other letters too to add emphasis to his closing words and to validate that the letter was genuine. It was very much like a signature and a handwritten P.S. today. Did you know that a P.S. in a direct mail letter is read by seven times as many people as read the body of the letter itself?

10. Why were the Judaizers trying to compel the Christians to be circumcised? (6:12)

Paul says they are trying to make a good outward impression and to avoid being persecuted. Paul may be exaggerating the situation or using barbed humor, inviting the Galatians to laugh at the Teachers (Martyn, 1997). It is not easy to see why an insistence on circumcision would enable them to avoid persecution. From who? Some powerful ultra-conservative group in the Jerusalem church? Or with Jews that were angry that Gentiles were being accepted into the ‘people of God?’ We just don’t know. However, it does seem that they were thinking just of themselves and their own reputation rather than honoring God or the salvation of the Gentiles. Basically, they were hypocrites. Do we find this kind of hypocrisy today, i.e., people saying, “I want you to do this for your own good” but actually meaning, “I want you to do it for my good (or so I look good).” [The more common form of hypocrisy can be summarized as: “do what I say, not what I do.”]

11. In your own words, what’s the meaning of v. 6:14 – May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Jeremiah 9:24, 1 Corinthians 1:31)

In v. 6:13 Paul says the Judaizers are boasting about their success in persuading some of the Galatians to undergo circumcision. He contrasts this with what he sees as the only appropriate form of boasting: Christ crucified. He also contrasts their motivation with his: theirs to increase their own reputation; Paul’s to increase God’s glory.

Jeremiah 9:24 – but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

1 Corinthians 1:31 – Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the LORD.”

12. Often glossed over, v. 6:15 is one of the richest theological statements in the letter. How so?

The last phrase of this verse is the Good News, the whole point of Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection, well stated in the New Living Translation: “What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation.”

NRSV – a new creation is everything!

CEV – All that matters is that you are a new person.

This is expanded upon in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Some of the Galatians had missed the whole point of the Good News, that a new creation had come for everyone through Christ and the Spirit, not by human effort. In v. 16 Paul then extends this blessing to all believers (with scholars offering several interpretations for the phrase, “the Israel of God”).

Galatians 6:1-18 ~ Scripture Verses

Doing Good to All

¹ Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load.

⁶ Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Not Circumcision but a New Creation

¹¹ See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

¹² Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

¹⁷ Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.