



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 6: 1-10

Summer 2021

“Our Brother’s Keeper”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Chris and thank you, Steve. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Galatians. We're coming to the end of it. We have one more lesson after this, but we're looking this morning at Galatians 6, verses 1 through 10,

⁶ 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. 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. 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.

⁶ The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*. 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. 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.

Galatians 6: 1-10

May the LORD bless this reading of His word, and bless our time of studying it.

(Message) There is a house, an old house on a hill in Thomaston, Maine, just off highway 1. It's the house of General Henry Knox. I've passed it often. It's where a letter from George Washington came, just after the Revolutionary War. In it, Washington told his friend that he felt like a wearied traveler who had carried a heavy burden on his shoulders. But now, relieved of the burden, he could look back and he could see how he had escaped what he called quicksand and mires that were in his way. "None," he wrote, "but the all-powerful God and great disposer of human events, none but God could have prevented his falling."

I read that because Christians are like that. We carry a burden on our shoulder. Not the burden of sin—that fell off when we came to the cross; but a burden of Christian responsibilities. Paul says, in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 5, that we must 'bear our own load.' It's a heavy load, and when we look back, we will see how the LORD kept us from falling under it and made us reach our goal safely.

But, the LORD also uses us to do that for one another. In verse 2, Paul instructs us to "bear one another's burdens." That's how we make it through the spiritual battle we are in and along the path that we're on. That's Paul's teaching in our passage in Galatians 6. It answers Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). 'Yes', Paul says, 'we are our brother's keeper.' This is what the Spirit led Christian does. The general principle is given in verse 2 with the statement, "bear one another's burdens."

But Paul begins the chapter with a specific example of burden bearing by giving the instruction in verse 1 to restore those who have fallen into sin. "Brethren," he writes, "even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness."

Now he has instructed us to "walk by the Spirit." (Gal 5:16). That's been the subject of the previous passage. And the word *trespass* literally means 'fall beside'. It has

the sense of 'taking a false step', 'a misstep'. And when we don't keep in step with the Spirit, we take false steps, stumble and fall beside the path—fall into error, like legalism, or the deeds of the flesh that he spoke of in the previous chapter. Or any trespass that he has just mentioned in verse 1.

And when we don't keep in step with the Spirit, we do that. That can happen to anyone of us if we're not careful about our spiritual walk. We can wander and be "overtaken" by a sin, as Paul says—which has the idea of being surprised by it. The careless life will always be surprised by sin. What's to be done for such a person that does fall into such a sin—any sin? Well, do we sew a scarlet letter on his or her shirt? Paul says something different. He says we are to "restore such a one."

The verb here was used in the New Testament of *mending* fishing nets. We see that at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, in Mark chapter 1, verse 19, when James and John are with their father there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and they're "*mending* the nets" when Jesus comes and calls them. And also, in ancient medical books, this word was used of *setting* a broken bone. Each of those tasks takes some skill. Now that's implied here.

A number of years ago, my daughter broke her arm roller skating. She was young and had an accident. And so my wife rushed her to an orthopedic surgeon who gave her some options, but recommended setting it the old-fashioned way—without anesthetic. Now he was very experienced. He had set a lot of broken limbs on the ski slopes of Switzerland. So he knew his craft and said that it would be the most efficient way; and the one with the least complications. So, that's what he did. He calmly took her arm, and then suddenly, with a jerk and a twist, set it. It takes a great deal of skill and experience to do that.

So spiritual rehabilitation should be done by those "who are spiritual", whose life is controlled by the Spirit, and producing the fruit of the Spirit. That's how we know one is walking by the Spirit. He or she is producing those nine virtues, the fruit of the Spirit. And they are competent because they have this special quality that Paul recommends for effectively restoring a brother—setting a spiritual bone, so to speak, and that is

gentleness, one of the nine virtues listed in that 'fruit of the Spirit.' We restore and we rehabilitate the broken with gentleness.

Luther put it well in a flowery kind of way. He put it very well. He wrote, "Run to him," (that person that you're going to correct), "and reach out your hand. Raise him up again. Comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms." Well, that's the Spirit that Paul is calling for here. That's one of the reasons that only the spiritual can do the ministry of restoring a fallen brother. Only the spiritual can be gentle.

Now ideally, that it isn't some elite group that we're talking about here. It would characterize all of us at the various stages of our maturity—but we will be showing this fruit of the Spirit at every level. But it's what we should all strive to be, spiritual people. But that only happens as we walk by the Spirit. And then we will be looking to do the things that Paul says here. We will be looking to be a help to one another.

At the same time, Paul gives the warning that we are to be looking out for ourselves, as well, so that we, too, will not be tempted. The Spiritual person is humble, and knows that he or she could stumble very easily. We're all prone to wander, and fall off that path that we should be on, and fall into what Washington called the "mires" or the "quicksand". So the ministry of correction should never be done with a sense of superiority, but always with a sense of humility.

This specific command to restore the fallen is then broadened in verse 2 to include all kinds of problems. "Bear one another burdens," Paul says, "and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." Paul's instruction here would have been particularly appropriate for those who are caught in the great error that he's addressing in this book—the error of legalism—because the legalist doesn't bear other's burdens. He lays them on. And we can say that with some certainty because that's the way Jesus described the legalist. That's the way He described the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23, verse 4. "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger."

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "The legalist is always harder on other people than he is on himself." And that's true. The Christian, on the other hand, demands more of himself than he does other people—and he helps them. So the mature Christian tries to unbind the legalistic bundles and burdens that have been laid on others, and tries to guard the weak against stumbling into, not only that error, but all kinds of error—moral error. But it's more than that. Paul's instruction here applies to burdens of any kind; we're to help. It's how we fulfill the law of Christ, by bearing the burdens of others.

"The law of Christ" (vs2), is an unusual expression. It does appear also in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 21, but it is essentially the commandment to 'love our neighbor'. That's been quoted already by Paul in chapter 5, verse 14—which he said, 'fulfills the whole Law.' Love never contradicts the holiness revealed in the Law of Moses. It seeks other people's highest good. It makes sacrifices. It bears burdens. And the model of that, of course, is the LORD Jesus Christ and His love; His character; His conduct. Christ loved others, and sacrificed Himself for them. We're to do the same. Of course, we can't sacrifice our self with the same kind of effect and purpose that He had—but we can live a sacrificial life as He did.

But again, that takes humility. A person can't be conceited or self-righteous and at the same time have sympathy or concern for the person who falls into sin, or the person who is in a position of weakness, a person who is in a position of need. And so to support his exhortation to bear each other's burdens, Paul says, in verse 3, "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." In other words, 'We're all nothing', that's what he's saying.

Now, if you want to know what you really are, the Scriptures have plenty of explanations and descriptions of that. Psalm 103, verse 14 is particularly to the point where He says, "that we are *but* dust." So what are we? Reduce it down to that, dust. Weak dust, common dust, nothing special in that. And if you stand today and you prosper today, in light of that, you can know that ultimately it's only by the sovereign grace of God.

Self-inflation is self-deception. It is those who know their weaknesses, and know that we are all saved by God's mercy alone, that are the most likely to show mercy to others. Service takes humility.

But it also takes responsibility and that's what Paul urges in verse 4, where he warns against making personal comparison. The proud do that. They build themselves up in their own estimation by comparing themselves and their work to the work of, say, a fallen brother. And so they can say, 'Well, I know I'm not perfect, but I didn't do that.' They're like the Pharisee, in contrast to the publican, who said, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people, swindlers, adulterers, and that tax collector.' (Luke 18:11).

Paul says, 'Don't do that.' Let each one examine his own work. We are responsible for the specific task that God has given each of us to do. Christ is our standard—not each other. I think we can take motivation from others that we see around us; and people who have taught us; and other kinds of examples that many other people show. But our chief example, our standard is not each other, it is the LORD Jesus Christ. And so we're to keep our eyes on Him, model our lives after Him and seek to please Him. That will give us the full measure of ourselves. And compared to Christ, no one can be arrogant.

We will confess if we do that, we compare ourselves to Him, that we're like those servants in Luke, chapter 17, verse 10, who said after they'd done everything that they were required to do, 'We are unprofitable servants. We had only done what we were supposed to do.'

We are answerable to God for what we do, not each other. It's His approval that matters. The approval that men give you comes and goes. And the day will come when the only thing that matters is Christ and His approval.

And Paul reminds the Galatians of that in verse 5, about personal responsibility, where says, "Each one will bear his own load." Now, if you have a King James Version, the text reads, "Every man shall bear his own burden." And that might seem to contradict the instruction that Paul has just given in verse 2 about, 'bearing one another's burdens.' But there is no conflict between the two; the words in the Greek text

are different words. Verse 2 is 'a burden too heavy for a person to lift.' He needs the assistance of another. It's the burden of failure, it's the burden of affliction, or hardship, or temptation—it can be any kind of burden that is too difficult for that individual. He needs help.

In verse 5, the burden is '*a load*', like 'a pack that a traveler carries'. It's his own possession. It's what he must carry. It refers to his own, personal responsibilities. Verse 2 is about our responsibility toward others. Verse 5 is about our responsibilities to ourselves. Verse 2 is about the present—what we're to be doing, right now, for those around us; and verse 5 really looks to the future. And what Paul is saying here is, 'God has given each of us a load to carry.' He's given us 'a pack', so to speak, full of duties and tasks that we are to complete—gifts that He's given us that we are to use in His service. All of the various responsibilities that are ours, that's our load. And we are on a personal mission to fulfill that.

And some day in the future, in "the day of Christ". (Phil 2:16), we will all give an account for how we carried it out; how we carried out our mission. The LORD won't ask us how we did in comparison with other people. He won't ask Paul how his achievements compare to Peter's. Or how yours compare to mine. Or how mine compare to Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. (I hope I'm right about that. *[Laughter]*, I think I'm right about that.)

At the final tribunal each one of us will give an account of himself to God. That's Romans chapter 4, verse 12. And you find a parallel to that in 2 Corinthians 5:10. "We will stand before the *Bema* seat of Christ...", and answer for the things that we've done—both good and bad. So we're to look to ourselves in preparation for that day. Those who do, of course, will also look to others and be willing to bear one another's burdens, as their brother's keeper.

Having said that, in verse 6, Paul returns to the responsibility that we have toward others, and the Christian use of money. He writes, in verse 6, "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*." Well, that's

the responsibility of the church—meeting a teacher's material needs. It's another way of stating the principle that the LORD Himself taught that, "...the laborer is worthy of his wages." (Luke 10:7).

Now, no minister should undertake his labor for wages. His chief concern is serving the LORD, not personal gain. And that responsibility is also given here—it is giving instruction. Now that's the main duty of a minister. Everything else is subordinate. Teaching is the fundamental task of the ministry. That's what a minister of the Gospel is to spend his time doing, and preparing to do. And that is what we, as members of a church, members of this church, are to desire for ourselves. We're to desire men to teach us, instruct us, build us up in the faith, because it's through the Word of God that we gain wisdom, it's through the Word of God that we are sanctified. And so, we're to look to the individuals to do that, to provide that. He equips them to do that. That's what we're to expect.

A warning is given in verse 7. Paul gives it in a principle that is illustrating a spiritual law. It's a principle taken from agriculture to draw an analogy between what the farmer does and what we do. It's the law of 'sowing and reaping'. Verse 7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." That's been called "an immutable law of God." And it certainly is.

We see that materially on a farm. If a farmer wants a harvest, he has to plant seed. If he sows good seed, he can expect a good harvest—he can expect a good crop. If he sows liberally, he can expect a large harvest. If he wants a particular crop, then he must sow the right seed. If he wants corn, then he's got to sow corn. If he wants wheat, then he must sow wheat. Whatever he sows—he gets. That's all very obvious. It was obvious to Paul. It should be obvious to us. —And that applies to us spiritually.

As John Stott put it, "If he sows wild oats, as we sometimes say, then he must not expect to reap strawberries." Or as Hosea warned, "They sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind." (Hos 8:7). And it's reaping the whirlwind that Paul was trying to prevent in his warning here. So he says, "Do not be deceived." —'Don't think we don't live in a

moral universe and that actions have no consequences.' People do that. People live that way. They live as though they can ignore God's truth and get away with it. That's the society we live in: It gives no credence to the will and the Word of God. It's all a deception—and it has a harvest. Everything counts, and everything sown has a harvest. That's the "immutable law of God".

As Paul says, "God is not mocked." Now the word *mocked* is an interesting word. It is from the word for *nose* —and literally means to 'turn up the nose at', 'to sneer at', 'to treat with contempt'. And that's what a person does when he or she ignores God's principles of conduct. Indifference toward God is an insult that He doesn't ignore. Now I'll say this, He's very patient toward those who, as it were, 'turn up their nose' to Him. But eventually, that brings a harvest of sorrow. The Bible's full of examples of men who experienced that. They resisted God, they rejected His will, and they suffered defeat. Pharaoh, Saul, Herod, many others—life is filled with examples of that. "God is not mocked."

Paul states the consequences of sowing 'good' and sowing 'evil' in verse 8: 'Those who sow to their own flesh...reap corruption,' he said, 'and those who sow to the Spirit will...reap eternal life.' This contrast is from what we read previously last week in chapter 5 with the *works* or the *deeds* "of the flesh" and "the fruit of the Spirit". A person sows to his own flesh by giving in to the desires of the flesh, by practicing the very things that he listed: Immorality, sensuality, strife, jealousy...

I find it interesting, as I read over that list of the deeds of the flesh, how much emphasis he puts on things like *jealousy* and *strife* that bring about divisions within a church. It's as though this is what he really saw prominently in these Galatian churches; and it's what happens so often in the churches of Jesus Christ. We, over the strangest things, maybe the smallest kinds of things, become divided and jealous—and there's strife.

So he warns against that kind of thing. This is 'sowing to the flesh.' And that has consequences in a person's life and in the life of the church. There is a harvest of corruption, Paul is saying, which is both physical and spiritual. It's both psychological and

social. You see it, for example, in David, who sowed to the flesh with Bathsheba and reaped terrible consequences. And it will be the case with each one of us if we follow that path—it has a bitter end.

But Paul's warning is not only for the libertine. It's also for the legalist and those following the teaching of the legalist is that which Paul is so concerned about here, with these Galatians, is sowing to the flesh. You might not think of it in that way, but legalism is preeminently that. —It gratifies the flesh; it gratifies the human nature: the pride that we have and the sense of self-sufficiency. It is the opposite of grace and the sovereign work of God that He does through the Holy Spirit. And the result of that, of such a system, this system of legalism, is death.

The temptation to go in either direction, to go the direction of the legalist or the libertine—to “sow to the flesh”, is a strong temptation. That's why we need to be our brother's keeper. That's why we need to bear one another's burdens and restore the brother who steps off the path and into the quicksand and deliver him or her from corruption.

In Galatians 5, the emphasis is on the Christian's duty to ‘walk by the Spirit’. Here in Galatians 6, the emphasis is on our duty to ‘sow to the Spirit’—and in doing that, bear one another's burdens.

Well that requires some heavy lifting, and that's never easy. So, in verse 9, Paul offers some incentive. He writes, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." Now Paul is still using the analogy of the farmer here. And in using it here to remind people that the results of ‘sowing to the Spirit’, the results of serving the LORD and walking in the right path, all of that—the results don't come immediately. It takes time. It takes long hours of labor to see them. And that can be a trial for all of us. As one of the old commentators put it, “We want to sow and reap in the same day.” —But the harvest doesn't come in a day.

And so, impatience of the flesh; or the distractions of the world; or the opposition of people to our work and to the Gospel—all tempt us to lose heart and to

say, "Let somebody else do it. I'm tired of this. I'm not seeing any results. It's difficult bearing others' burdens." Then there's the simple fact that, as Calvin put it, "We are naturally lazy in the duties of love." So oftentimes we would rather spend our time doing other things than 'burden bearing'.

But Paul says, 'No, no, we are to keep at it!' Not with a sense of resignation, like, 'This is what I have to do'. But with a sense of joy because it is right; what we're doing because it is our service to the LORD—and because there is a great reward in it. In due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 'The harvest will come', is what he's saying. And that's the encouragement.

The problem for us is we don't know when that harvest will come. The farmer knows when the crops will come in. Seed time and harvest follow the same pattern every year. But a spiritual harvest is very different. We can't calculate when there will be fruit. God is sovereign and He is LORD of the harvest. We plant, we water, but He gives the growth—and we can never know His schedule. It's according to His great wisdom; He knows—and we have to leave that to Him.

But the result of that is we can experience frustration and weariness in the work. We want to see visible results. And when we don't see them, we wonder if, 'Well maybe we're doing things the wrong way. We're not doing it the right way. We should be doing something new. Maybe we should try something innovative.' Well that may get results, but those results may not be the LORD's results, and they may not be spiritual fruit at all. To get that, to get what is right and best, we have to do things God's way. Which is according to His Word, and that is to preach the Word, that is to obey the Word, that is to encourage others and caution them, based on Scriptures. —That's the right way.

The results may not be immediate, they may not be spectacular, like we would want, but they will come "in due time", Paul says. So we are to "not grow weary."

There are stories of missionaries who spent their lives in the mission field without seeing the harvest. It seemed as though they were sowing on rocky soil. And then, at the end of their lives, or even in the next generation, the harvest came. I think of David Livingston. He explored Africa, spending his whole life in Africa. They say he had

one convert—and he may have left the faith at the end. But that life became an example to others, and the next generation followed. —And great work followed as a result of all of that.

God's Word will not go out and return to Him empty. It can't. 'It will accomplish the purpose that He desires,' that's Isaiah, chapter 55, verse 11. Nothing is wasted when it is done in obedience to His Word and in service to Him. God always blesses our efforts. —"In due time". That's a sure promise.

And that is true of our lives, personally, not just in terms of a ministry and a church, but in terms of our personal lives. One of the main objects of our concern should be ourselves: our own growth; our own spiritual welfare. We are to be learning and growing personally; sowing to the Spirit. Growth is slow. It is always slow. It requires steady, consistent attention. It requires a lifetime of attention. But the promise is that there will be fruit. The harvest will come "in due time". So we're not to grow weary. We do grow weary. We all grow weary, but Paul says, 'Don't do that. Don't succumb to that.'

Ultimately, though, Paul's encouragement has to do with 'the end of the age' and Christ's return. That is when the great harvest will occur. And we, His faithful servants, will reap eternal rewards. We will enter glory and we will hear the LORD say, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master." (Mat 25:21). —Now that's worth living for.

If we're only living for this moment; if we're only living for material things; material gain—then we're just 'time servers'. —And the rewards of that can only be provided by the things of time—and they don't last. Those who sow to the flesh, give in to it, or simply invest their lives in this present age, (I think that, too, is sowing to the flesh. It's not only immorality and that kind of thing, or dissipation; it's devoting one's life to the things of this age), that do not last. And all that the world can do, all that we can receive from that, is what the world can give—what 'time' can give. —And whatever that is, at its best, is really not very much. And it does not last!

But those who "sow to the Spirit" and invest in the kingdom to come, reap eternal rewards. And in the meantime, they live the best life there is to live. You want the good life; you want the truly good life? That's the good life, "sowing to the Spirit"; living for the LORD in which we see souls saved; and we see our own lives changed—and fruitful. Not because we're personally adequate for the task, but because the Spirit of God is within us, enabling these things, and producing this. That's the life we want to pursue.

We will see results in ourselves, and in the people we help, in whom we invest our time and effort, "...if," as Paul says, "we do not grow weary." "So then," he writes in verse 10, "while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." We are to help our neighbors generally—everyone we can wherever we see a need. That's the good Samaritan. When we see it, we're to help.

But our first responsibility, Paul is saying here, is to the people of God. They are "the household of faith". They are our spiritual family. They are our brothers and sisters. They are loved by Christ; and they love Him. They are His representatives in this world and the people that we will be with for all eternity. We cannot ignore them—they have priority. What a bad witness it would be if we neglected our own. The world would not say of us, as those ancient pagans said of the early Christians, "See how they love one another." We are to love one another.

And love is active, not simply a sentimental feeling. It is active. We love by bearing one another's burdens. But the time to do that is limited, and it may be short. Paul said, we are to do good "...while we have opportunity." And opportunity that is lost is lost forever. And soon the LORD may return when all opportunities end—or soon our lives may end. You don't know if you'll be here tomorrow or later today. And when that comes, then we must stand before Him and give an account. The person who doesn't seize the opportunity will not reap the harvest.

So to sum up, let us not lose heart in doing good. Let us restore the erring Christian brother or sister. Let us bear others' burdens; carry our own; support the ministry of the Gospel; and do good to all men. Let us sow to the Spirit. He leads us. He is our all-powerful guide, and He will prevent us from falling—and assures us that in due time we will reap. —We will. So, “Do not grow weary.”

The promise of verse 8 is that those who sow to the Spirit shall, from the Spirit, reap eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of Christ. We receive it through faith in Him, and He gives the Holy Spirit to enable us, then, to live the life that we should live in the present.

So if you have not believed in Him, trust in Christ. He died for sinners. He receives and forgives all who do trust in Him. Then live for Him, and become your brother's keeper. May God help all of us to do that.

Father, we thank You for that great assurance we have of the LORD's love for us; Your love for us; the Triune God's love for us; and the hope we have of someday seeing the LORD. That this life, which is brief, will end and will end in glory, ultimately, for all of Your people. We thank You for that. Help us to keep that in mind, to ever have that present before us. Give us perspective on life that we might live life as we should live it, unto You, to Your glory. And one of the chief ways we do that is by bearing one another's burdens. And so, Father, lay that on our hearts, that we might do that, be that kind of people.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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