

### ‘Responsibilities to each other.’ (17)

As we enter the final chapter of **Galatians**, we find Paul writing to the church in Galatia concerning their responsibilities toward one another in Christian service. He’s going to tell them that there are things which must be done to fight against the negative impact these legalistic teachers have done within the church.

I heard a story about a woman who asked the local priest to forgive her because she committed the sin of having plenty of pride, she confessed to him that every time she looked in the mirror, she would say to herself, ‘**wow, I’m so beautiful and gorgeous**’. The priest being very sympathetic, informed her that she actually wasn’t sinning, she was simply mistaken.

Paul begins by saying in **Galatians 6:1** “**Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.**” Paul says, that there are times when a Christian lets their guard down, and sin can easily enter our lives and overtake us. And before we know what’s happened we become under the bondage of sin again.

You see, we must be on our guard as Christians against the devil and His schemes. **1 Peter 5:8** “**Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**” A lion roars, not only when it’s hunting but also when it’s about to attack its prey. And loved ones, as Christians, we better believe that he’s always hunting, he always ready to attack us. And so, we must keep our guards up, otherwise we’ll fall into sin again which can easily take over our lives.

Now, **whose responsible for helping those who are caught up in sin?** Paul says, ‘**you who live by the Spirit**’, in other words, those who are spiritually mature. **Why would that be the case? Why wouldn’t a young immature Christian be responsible for helping those caught up in sin?** It’s the responsibility of the strong in the faith to watch out for the weak in the faith, that’s why having spiritually mature elders is so important for a church.

This doesn’t mean that the spiritually mature are beyond temptation and sin but it means they should be mature enough to deal with the situation. They are matured enough to understand that they’re dealing with spiritual things, in the spiritual realms. Whereas a younger immature Christian may not have the experience in dealing with people. And as we shall see in a moment, the immature Christian may not be strong enough to resist any temptation which comes there way whilst trying to help someone else.

And notice how the mature Christian should go about helping someone caught up in a sin. Paul says, “**you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.**” Too many times the church has made a big mistake by sending the wrong people to help those caught up in sin. They go in there with book, chapter and verse, they go to the person and do nothing but rebuke them and warn them of the consequences of sin. But Paul says, restoring someone should be done with a spirit of gentleness.

Listen loved ones, if someone comes up to you and confesses they’re struggling with some sin, the very fact that they spoke to you about it, should tell you they want help with it. They don’t need condemning, they need encouragement. The whole church doesn’t need to know about it, they need support and prayers from you. You see, when sin enters someone life, the spiritually mature should be keeping in the back of their minds, containment. Negative news disheartens a church, it weakens a church.

And so, everything should be done to contain a problem until it gets to the stage where it can’t be contained anymore. In other words, if the sin involves harming the witness of the church as a whole, then it should be brought to the church, but even at that, all the details should be limited. **Do we honestly think that a visitor from the community needs to hear that brother or sister so and so is caught up in some sin?**

In the context of Galatians, Paul is saying that those who have given in to the onslaught of legalism must be restored. Yes, there were many legalists among the churches in Galatia, but not all of them were legalists. Some of them knew what grace was all about, they understand the nature of God’s grace. It’s the legalistic who are the first to condemn, and then ask for others to conform to their judgment. They conduct witch hunts, and then send out judgments in order that others be intimidated into conforming to their condemnation of the witch.

Instead of having a love that covers a multitude of sins they are harsh and judgmental. Legalism promotes spiritual and intellectual arrogance, and so the legalist is harsh toward others. Those who understand God’s grace, trust in God’s grace for salvation by faith.

And it those Christians, that Paul is appealing to, to help those other Christians, whose lives have been devastated by legalistic teaching. The faithful will restore the fallen with a spirit of gentleness. The legalist will often demonstrate a spirit of harshness and pride. The faithful will restore the unfaithful on the basis of knowing that he could also fall. The legalist will arrogantly assume that he has marked off all his checklist, and so, will seek to restore a person to his checklist.

When Roxanne gave birth to Kamren, I remember sitting around chatting about how beautiful he was and then Roxanne asked me if I wanted to hold him. I was so excited and when I held Kamren in my arms, I remember thinking how different this was from holding an older child whose three or four years old. I remembered a word that crops up in the Bible from time to time, the word, 'gentleness'.

Paul says, when we confront someone caught in sin, we must do it gently. **And what does that tell us?** It tells us that, like new-born babies, human beings are fragile. Not, in most cases, physically fragile, but spiritually fragile and emotionally fragile. You see, the church repeatedly makes a mess of trying to help someone caught up in a sin because they send the wrong people to help them or it's handled with the gentleness of a brick. We also make a mess of trying to restore someone whose caught up in a sin because we don't understand the meaning of the word 'restore'.

Paul says, **"you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently."** If I had a beautiful vase on my coffee table and someone came along and knocked it over and broke it. If I really loved that vase, I would go out of my way to have it restored and I would place it back where it belongs on the coffee table.

Yes, you may see the cracks from where it was broken, yes it may not look as beautiful as it once did. But the restoration isn't all about the outward looks, it's about putting that vase back where it belongs. Restore means to repair and to put back to where it was intended to be.

You know, some people get caught up in a sin, they repent and church accepts them back into fellowship, but they accept them with terms and conditions. In other words, we say things like, **'oh your welcome to worship with us, but we don't want you to teach kid's Bible class anymore.'** **'You're welcome to worship with us, but we don't want you to preach or lead in any way during worship'.**

Yes, there may be times when a person continues in that sin and refuses to repent. But God is in the restoration business loves ones, we see the cracks of sin in our lives. We feel the brokenness in our souls which our sin leaves behind, but when God restores, He puts us back to where we're supposed to be. We make a mess of it because we see that broken vase, we think we've restored it but all we've done is leave it in the cupboard, instead of being on that coffee table where it belongs. And when we do that, all we're doing is adding to that person's burden.

**Galatians 6:2 "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ."** You see, the legalist wants to add to our burdens, they add the burden of their traditions and opinions on the conscience of those who are sincerely seeking to serve God. **Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves."**

**James 5:16 "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."** In other words, it's our responsibility as brothers in Christ to help one another in the faith. Christianity doesn't isolate individuals from one another.

**Hebrews 10:23+24 "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."** Christians must individually and collectively support one another to be faithful.

You know, a few years ago, I heard several Christians say to me, **'oh, I don't want to burden the church.'** So, I asked, **'how could you be a burden? You're a part of my family, this is what we do for each other.'** Loved ones, we always talk about being **'brothers'** and **'sisters'** in Christ, but I don't think we stop to really think about what it means that we are family.

I remember hearing a story about two brothers who were walking one day, and the younger one became tired, so he asked his older brother to carry him. The older boy scooped his brother up in his arms and began to carry him. As he walked, a neighbour chuckled and said, **'Wow. He must be heavy.'** And the older boy replied, **'He ain't heavy, he's my brother!'**

Now that's a cute story, but let's be realistic, the younger boy would have weighed exactly the same if he hadn't been the brother to the other boy, but because he's family, the load seems much lighter, **doesn't it?** You see, the law of Christ is to love one another and this law of Christ brings individuals together into a common bond and fellowship. The law of the legalist doesn't do that, their law divides, and it divides by the binding of strict hair-splitting opinions and interpretations.

Paul already said back in **Galatians 5:14** "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: **“Love your neighbour as yourself.”** Loving one another means carrying each other's burdens, but you need to allow the church to do that. God doesn't want you to suffer or struggle with anything loves ones, He provided a church family to help you carry the load.

The legalistic won't carry your burden they'll add to it, they'll give you even more to struggle with. That's why Paul continues and says in **Galatians 6:3** "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves." **Have you ever heard the term, 'oh they're out of their depth'?**

When I first attended Bible school I felt like that, I was surrounded by all these godly teachers whom I thought knew everything about anything to do with the Bible. And here was I, as a young Christian, who thought I knew a lot of things about the Bible but in reality, I didn't know much, I was out of my depth. And there have been times when I've been studying with other religious people and thought to myself, I'm going to show them what's what from the Bible but they start quoting Hebrew and Greek words and their meaning, and I'm left feeling way out of my depth. And those have been the times when I truly believed I was something, when I wasn't, in effect, I was deceiving myself.

The legalist has deceived himself into thinking that his works have justified him before God. They don't need the grace of God, they just need to keep the rules. And all that does is promote arrogant self-deception, and it clouds our minds of the grace of God. **Romans 12:3** "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.**"

**1 Corinthians 10:12** "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" **And how do we know if we're becoming a little too arrogant and self-reliant?** **Galatians 6:4+5** "Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load."

We know we're becoming arrogant and self-reliant when we start comparing ourselves with others. As Christians, we must consider our own work in reference to God alone. Otherwise we start boasting about our good works and contrasting our good works against our brothers and sisters. In other words, when we start contrasting ourselves with others, we begin to judge others by our own standards and not God's.

**1 Corinthians 15:10** "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." You see, Paul looked at his own work as a response to God's grace. He understood he didn't work his way into God's grace, but grace has worked him into God's work of grace.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The point is that those who are of the faith of Abraham, view their work in response to God's grace but the legalist views his work in comparison to his brother. Those of the faith of Abraham work in thanksgiving but the legalist works and compares his work with his brother.

But loved ones, all this legalistic way of trying to please God just promotes competition with our brother. And make no doubt about it, the legalist is eager to compare his works with those of others. Instead of proving his work in reference to the will of God, they seek not only to use their works as a measurement by which his brother should measure his, but also the standard by which he judges his brother.

The legalist also assumes that they are doctrinally correct on all issues and so, they compare their beliefs with those of others. And as we know, if others don't agree with their opinions and interpretations, then the legalist considers everyone else to be liberal. We have to remind ourselves that fundamental, or essential teaching, isn't revealed in the Bible in a way that is difficult to understand. Fundamental teachings are made in plain statements of revelation. God communicated what was necessary for salvation and moral behaviour through words which everyone can understand, even the uneducated.

Now notice that Paul says in **Galatians 6:9** “for each one should carry their own load.” Now wait a minute Paul, didn't you just say in **Galatians 6:2** that we're to “carry each other's burdens, and in this way, we will fulfil the law of Christ.”

Well, the word in **verse 2** refers to a heavy burden to be borne. The word here refers to the burden of a soldier, in other words, every soldier must carry his own pack. And it's the same with a Christian, there is a burden of responsibility each Christian must bear. The word used here refers us back to the thoughts of **Galatians 6:4** and stresses the individual's responsibility toward God.

Now I know that we're family and we're supposed to help each other but ultimately, we're responsible for our own relationship with God. **Romans 2:6** “God will repay each person according to what they have done.”

**1 Corinthians 3:8** “The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.” When it comes to the final judgment, no one will be responsible for someone else's personal behaviour. **2 Corinthians 5:10** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

You see, legalism lends itself to making judges out of every self-appointed theologian who has deceived himself into believing that he's right in every doctrinal corner of religious thought. That's why James wrote to every legalist, and says in **James 4:12** “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?”

Loved ones, we must be on our guard against legalism because it will rip a congregation apart. We have to keep examining ourselves and ask if we're becoming a little too judgmental with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have to remind ourselves of the responsibility we have for other Christians.

**Am I carrying my own load but at the same time helping my brethren carry theirs? Am I working for grace or because of grace?** Remember that none of us are working for our salvation, we're working because our salvation motivates us to work for God.

And if you're not a Christians this morning, you need to understand that there's nothing you can do to earn your salvation. All you have to do is accept God's grace and do what God asks you to do to receive it. Please don't leave here today without asking someone what God requires of you to receive salvation.