

realistic and godly in their assessment of their own place and work within the church of God, and not claimed to be something they are not (6:3)!

### Application

There is one small problem which is often found when people read this passage in most translations, but is avoided because of the way I have presented the text; and I have done this purposefully. Most translations read the following for verse 2; 'bear each other's burdens ...', and they also translate verse 5; 'each one should bear their own burden'! It does not take much to spot that the one verse appears to contradict the other! You could quote whichever verse suited your purposes when asked for help, for example! I hope that the explanation of the texts above and the translations I have given will help to avoid this misunderstanding. Really, the first text (6:2) is Paul's way of reminding Christians about how to put into effect the commandment of Jesus that we love one another, by helping each other. The second text (6:5) is Paul's way of imploring individuals to take personal responsibility for their actions (and differences in the original Greek demonstrate this). The two admirably summarise the whole passage!

When God's people are honest with themselves, with each other, and with God, then the on-going problems that each of us have with sin can be dealt with; but there are few churches where this is done effectively. Most main-stream denominations insist on prayers of confession, repentance and absolution (that is, a pronouncement of forgiveness from God) being said in each service of worship, but my experience of worship commonly practiced today is that the subject of sin is rarely dealt with by preachers or worship leaders. In addition, many people in church feel guilty about sin and do not talk about it at all. The Catholic Church and some Anglican churches maintain traditions of 'Confession' which can often be very meaningful to people but are unfortunately ignored or parodied by others. Some house-group or 'cell' churches incorporate the idea of confession and forgiveness within the discipline of small groups (as John Wesley did in the early days of Methodism), but methods for doing this are notoriously difficult to establish and practice.

One of the best ways that God's people can deal with problems of sin, today, is through one to one fellowship in open and frank support of one another, using the friendships and relationships which are naturally created in a church setting. This can be difficult for some, and any church needs to manage its pastoral work with care and integrity to make sure that people who obviously have personal problems have access to those who are willing to befriend and help. Trust and communication are essential if relationships are to be formed through which God can work to overcome the problems of sin in the believer. But it can and should be done. The health of God's people is at stake!

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. How can we help each other deal with sin in our lives if we do not confess it to each other? How and when do we do this?
2. Discuss in your group whether your own church deals with 'problem people' in the wrong positions of authority and power in a helpful way.
3. How is are God's people taught in your church? Can it be done better?

### Discipleship

What friends do you have who you would be willing to discuss your own sin with? This is a sharp question, but it is important, and I ask it of myself as well as of you. Burying the problems of sin will not benefit us or the church of God at large, and we all have an obligation to address this issue. The challenge I leave you with is to make sure you have someone to talk to, and you use them; regularly if possible!

### Final Prayer

Help us, dear Lord, to offer ourselves to You in a true spirit of worship. We seek to be set free to worship you in 'spirit and truth'; and yet without the presence of Your Spirit our efforts are meaningless. Fill us with Your Spirit, we pray, so that our worship may be a natural consequence of the lives we live for You; AMEN

### Prayer

Show us Your majesty and power, O Lord; break through the distress and strife we experience from time to time and reveal the love, the compassion and the heart You have for all of us who are Your fallen people. Raise us up to stand tall and unashamed of our faith within this world; and give us eyes to see the power and glory of Your Word at work ; AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Christian Hope

Yesterday, we prayed to ask the Lord to help us be ready for His coming in glory. In past generations, people did not pray to ask the Lord to come, but to delay, so that there could be time to complete the Christian calling of preaching to all the nations! It remains our hope that all people will hear the Gospel, so pray that this great commission of Christ might be fulfilled.

### Meditation

Rejoice to see the day's beginning;  
See the providential power of God at work,  
Gloriously driving on the Universal Law  
Of goodness, faith, and hope and love.

Dispel the demons of today's despair;  
The sinister, destructive power of Evil,  
Driving everything backwards; even you and me,  
Towards unhappiness, gloom and anguish.

Let the power of God reign now; let Jesus live!  
Say 'No contest, Satan!' Deep within our souls  
The Spirit stamps the image of our Maker  
And we, by Faith, can taste the victory He's won!

### Bible Study - Galatians 6:1-6

<sup>1</sup> My friends, if anyone is caught in some transgression, you who are spiritual should set such a person right in a spirit of gentleness. But guard yourself, or you may also be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear the weight of each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For a person who thinks he is somebody when he is really nothing deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each person evaluate their own deeds; then they can have pride in their own work instead of comparing it with the work of others. <sup>5</sup> For each person should bear responsibility for their own work. <sup>6</sup> Those who are being taught the word should share everything properly with their teacher.

#### Review

If we were to pick this Scripture and read it as if it came from nowhere in particular, then it would seem like another list of teachings by Paul. The subjects are separate and distinct, and make a memorable list;

1. how to set people right in Christian fellowship (6:1),
2. how to help one another – fulfilling the 'law of Christ' (6:2),
3. how to keep a proper perspective (6:3),
4. doing what is right and refraining from criticising others (6:4),
5. taking personal responsibility (6:5)
6. the right attitude towards Christian teachers (6:6)

It is very tempting to read each verse in this way, partly because a number of Paul's letters end with what appears to be almost random collections of teaching (2 Cor 13:5-10; 1 Thess 5:12-22; 2 Thess 3:11-15), all of which are short and memorable. However, this approach avoids having to think more deeply about the text, and means that a preacher preparing for a sermon has less work to do, and this is not good enough!

In truth, these words follow on from the previous verses about the 'works of the sinful nature', and the 'Fruit of the Spirit' (5:19f.), and they demonstrate how Paul's spiritual teaching needs to be put into practice. In addition, when Paul wrote, he was undoubtedly thinking about the churches of Galatia where there was strife and anger because of the teaching of Judaizers, and divisions about the nature of the true Gospel (see 3:1f. 4:8f.). In the light of all this, these six teachings may be seen in a new light.

For example, it seems sensible that immediately after the highlight of Paul's teaching about the 'Fruit of the Spirit', he should speak about helping people who were found committing sin. If Paul's letter said that Christians should show nothing except 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control' (5:22,23), then none of us would feel included in the Church! We aspire to these graces because they are not our everyday experience! So Paul explained how one who sinned had to be dealt with not by a high-handed attitude of judgement, but with 'gentleness' (6:1); which, of course, is one 'Fruit of the Spirit'. In saying this, Paul was not only consistent in his teaching but also profoundly wise in his counsel. He knew that even with the presence of the Holy Spirit, a Christian could still feel the pressures of the world, and 'may also be tempted' (6:1). His teaching was that the highest standards of faith should be practiced with the utmost humility and care for others.

Paul continues by advising people to bear each other's burdens and so 'fulfil the law of Christ' (6:2), and reminds us that Jesus' only commandment was to 'love one another, even as I have loved you ...' (John 13:34f.). The rest of Paul's teaching in this passage focuses on attitudes between people within the life of the church. He warns against those who have a higher opinion of themselves than they should (6:3), and it is likely that the Judaizers who tried to influence the Galatian churches showed a high handed attitude of this kind. What right had these people to teach something contrary to the great 'Council of Jerusalem' (Acts 15), at which the Apostles themselves had formally declared that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised?

All the problems in the Galatian churches could have been avoided if its members had been open with Paul from the beginning about their difficulties with various teachings. It is little wonder that Paul finished by imploring those who were learning to value what they had received (6:4), bear responsibility for putting into practice (6:5), and communicate fully and openly with their teachers (6:6)! It is a great pity that there is a chapter break between chapters 5 and 6 in Galatians, because without this, we would more readily see how the words in today's text help us to apply the teaching of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' in practical ways.

### Going Deeper

It may be possible to overplay the connections between the situation in the Galatian churches which led to the letter, and these individual teachings. As we look at them in more detail, we will consider their general value and also how all of them connect with the background and themes of Galatians in general.

#### **Helping one another and fulfilling 'the law of Christ'**

We have seen above how the first verse connects with the previous passage in Galatians, offering a Christ like and spiritual way of dealing with sin in the Christian community, with 'gentleness'. It seems certain, however, that the Gentile churches had experienced a fair amount of trouble and strife in recent times (hence Paul's letter), and although Paul's advice may be a corrective measure to help deal with those sins, his advice does connect back to the teaching of Jesus very strongly. It is not often that we can make good connections between the teaching of Paul and Jesus, so where we can, it should be appreciated to the full!

In verse 1, the word used by Paul translated 'transgression' is a general word for sin, but not one which means 'rebellion'. This is important because Paul could not talk about being gentle to someone who was in a state of rebellion against God; that is, a state of heart and mind which was in complete opposition to God. Someone like this should really not be in the church! The word 'transgression' is the same Greek word translated as 'trespass' as in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12,14), and where the Jesus taught that because of the presence of 'trespass' in the world, we should seek the Lord's help to overcome sin and 'trespass' through regular prayer, so Paul taught that the church should deal with such sins with 'gentleness'. What Paul taught, of course, could be said to be the answer to such prayers. A connection with the Lord's Prayer may also be suggested by Paul's following comment; 'guard yourself, or you may also be tempted.' Temptation is of course mentioned by Jesus in the verse adjacent to that which mentions 'trespass'.

The most important connection with the teaching of Jesus in this passage comes, as we have seen above, in verse 2, where Paul encourages Christian people to 'bear the weight of each other's burdens'. This is a phrase which has been well used within the Christian church, and we generalise it to mean helping people carry whatever problems they may have. However, if we think of verse 2 not as some separate teaching to verse 1, but a logical consequence of it, then what it means is this. From time to time, each of us will have to deal with one or other problem of sin. The way we should deal with it is to 'share the burden' (6:2) and help each other. Trespasses and sins do not normally 'go away' just because someone says a prayer (although this does happen sometimes!); if we have sinned, we need to repent, and this is best done by sharing our thoughts and feelings with others. Their perspectives can help us get to the roots of our problems so that they can be prayed over, and in this way we can lovingly help each other deal with our problems.

#### **Taking proper responsibility for what you do and say**

Surely, this is what it means to 'fulfil the law of Christ' which is to 'love one another'. Yet within the context of Christian fellowship, if people are to help each other in this way, then there needs to be a degree of trust between people, and this is what Paul addresses next. A strict translation of verse 3 from the Greek sounds strange; 'One who thinks he is something when he is nothing deceives himself!' This does not sound like good English, but it is fairly clear what it means, and the translator's problem is to try and find a suitable way of expressing Paul's sharp turn of phrase using normal English grammar!

We all know that problems arise in any church when people imagine they are something they are not. For example, I have listened to many worship leaders who fail to lead worship because they are too busy preaching mini-sermons between worship songs; and I have found people who hold high spiritual authority in the church when the only reason they do so is because there has been no-one else to do the job. I could go on, and you could add your own examples. What Paul faced, of course, was the fact that in the Galatian churches, people with strong opinions about Judasitic practices such as circumcision, regarded themselves as teachers of others, when in reality they only had opinions, and not the wider experience and knowledge required for exercising the gift of teaching. All this, says Paul, is deception; but really, we all know this. The genius of Paul was to point all this out so that we might learn from it.

Verses 4 and 5 follow through this train of thought and call on the Christian disciple to take responsibility for their own actions and 'works' (6:5) within the church. Paul was straight in his advice; he suggested that each individual should 'evaluate' (most translations have the word 'test') their own deeds or work within the church and take pride in what they are confident is right before God (6:4). This sounds straightforward, but it is the opposite of what most people do. In general, people enjoy making judgements about what other people do or do not do, and they then become consumed not with attention to their own responsibilities, but with the criticism of others! As Paul clearly saw in the life of the Galatian churches, this was a sure and certain route to the 'works of the sinful nature', in particular, 'strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions and envy' (5:20,21)

#### **Sharing teaching**

The last verse of our text is a little strange, and many commentaries express uncertainty about whether this verse should conclude the beginning of chapter 6 or begin the brief section of teaching which we will consider tomorrow, 6:7-10. I have kept the passage attached to this section because I reckon there is a link with Paul's concern at what has happened in the Galatian churches. In this whole passage, he has attempted to teach the Galatian people what they should do to rectify the problems which had occurred. Here, in verse 6, it is the Galatian people themselves who are the ones 'being taught the Word', and Paul is their teacher. From his point of view, he had the right to call himself their teacher because he was an Apostle (1:1) and was responsible for passing on the Gospel truths of Jesus Christ. Verse 6 hints that Paul felt the church had travelled down the wrong path by listening to bad teaching without getting it checked out by Paul earlier; hence the emphasis in the sentence on sharing 'everything properly' with the teacher. Paul felt that he could have put a stop to false teaching sooner if people had been frank with him (remembering that communication was by letter, but post was fairly reliable in the Roman Empire).

Each part of this series of teachings by Paul depends upon what has gone before, so it is easy to see that what Paul says about teaching in verse 6 is only possible if people have been