

# ***“Helping the Fallen”***

## **Galatians 6:1-5**

Baxter Exum (#1006)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
March 1, 2009



### **Introduction:**

This morning I would like for us to think back to a drowning that took place in August of 1985. But the situation is rather unusual because the drowning took place in the presence of 200 lifeguards. Back in August 1985, 200 lifeguards with the New Orleans Recreation Department had come together for a celebration. In fact, they were celebrating the first summer in memory that there had not been a single drowning at any of the city pools. As they were celebrating, a 31-year old man by the name of Jerome Moody drowned in the very pool where that celebration was taking place. According to the story in the New York Times, the body of Jerome Moody was found on the bottom of the deep end of a department pool as the party ended.

As we try to learn something from this tragic story, I would simply ask: Could it be possible for one of us to drown in sin right in the middle of the Lord's church without it being noticed?

And with that question in mind, I would invite you to turn with me to the book of **Galatians**, and in just a moment we will look together at a passage of Scripture in **Galatians 6**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1826**. And in the opening words of **Galatians 6**, the apostle Paul writes to the churches of Galatia and he tells them how to lift up and help those who have fallen into sin.

We understand that even as Christians, we are not immune from turning away from the gospel and back to sin. In fact, the Bible specifically says in **1 John 1:8**, ***“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*** In other words, sin is very real, and even members of this congregation will occasionally turn away from God. The question for this morning is: What do we do when this happens? As Christians, how are we to react? What should we do? How can we prevent a spiritual drowning right here among us as a congregation?

With this concern in mind, **»PPT»** I would invite you to look with me at **Galatians 6—Galatians 6:1-5**—the words of the apostle Paul...

***<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if***

*anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* <sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *For each one will bear his own load.*

As we consider these verses this morning, I would encourage you to keep your Bibles open as we study several very important ideas. There are certainly lessons here for those who may help, but there are also lessons here for those who may fall—those who may be in the process of slipping away—these are things we will be doing, and these are the attitudes we will have when one of our members is drowning in sin.

**I. One of the first things we notice right away in verse 1 is that Paul is dealing with those who are CAUGHT IN ANY TRESPASS. »PPT»**

We need to get it out in the open here at the beginning: Sin happens! As Paul says, *“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass....”* There is so much information in just these few words. It is interesting that Paul does not refer to a specific sin. The sin may be big or small, but the point is: A true Christian can get caught in any trespass. We need to remember that the Bible uses several common words for sin. The most common word refers to the idea of missing the mark—the idea of using a bow and an arrow. We are aiming for righteousness, but due to human weakness we do not accomplish what we set out to do, and the arrow misses the target.

But there are other words for sin in the New Testament, and from what I have read, the idea that comes across here in Galatians 6 is a little different from the idea of missing the mark. The word *“trespass”* refers to *“crossing the line,”* and so if I *“trespass”* on my neighbor’s property, it means that I have crossed the line. However, it is interesting that the idea of crossing the line is combined here with the idea of being *“caught.”* From what I understand, the word translated here as *“caught”* was used in the ancient world to refer to an animal that would get *“caught”* in a trap. Here the animal is going around minding its own business, it goes around sniffing for food, and suddenly the little critter is caught in a trap. It happens in the blink of an eye. We think about sin, and we know what Paul is talking about here!

One translation refers to doing something wrong *“on a sudden impulse”* (NEB). Other translations bring across the idea of being *“overtaken”* in a fault. One commentator says it refers to being *“caught off guard”* or almost *“surprised”* by what we have done. Another commentator suggested that this might be the result of flirting with a temptation that we thought we could withstand. Certainly, though, we understand that there is a huge difference between (on one hand) getting *“caught”* and (on the other hand) defiantly stepping across a line that God has told us not to cross. The Bible acknowledges the difference and gives us different guidelines. The man living in rebellion to God’s word in 1 Corinthians 5, for example, was to be immediately removed from the church to keep the sin from spreading. The divisive man in Titus 3 was to be rejected after only a first and a second warning.

But here in **Galatians 6** there is a difference. We remember Peter who messed up from time to time and how the Lord gently brought him back into line. Peter accepted the correction and moved on—he continued to grow. Even in our own court system, there is a difference between a premeditated crime and a crime that happens in a moment of passion. It is this second attitude that we are dealing with this morning—not an intentional sin, not a divisive spirit, but a situation where we look back and we are actually surprised by what we have done.

We look back on the sin we committed, and we think to ourselves, **“What in the world was I thinking?”** Sometimes we get involved with the wrong group of people (as Peter did), and we sin because of peer pressure. Sometimes we get stressed out, and Satan comes in and hits us at a moment of weakness. Sometimes we start down a road without really looking at where that road is going. It’s almost like going outside and slipping on the ice. We are walking along, and the next thing we know we are lying on the ground—wondering how we got there! We did not intend to slip, we did not wake up in the morning hoping to sin, and yet because we were perhaps not as careful as we should have been, we fall and we get hurt.

First of all, then, there is a message here for the one who sins. For those of us who get caught in sin, it is comforting to know that God has made provisions for having us picked up and put back together. When we slip and fall, when we get caught in Satan’s trap, there is a message here for us: God understands, and God has a plan. That brings us to the plan...

## II. We notice in **verse 1** that Paul tells us to **RESTORE THOSE WHO HAVE SINNED.** **»PPT»**

And we find right away in **verse 1** that this responsibility falls primarily on those who are **“spiritual.”** Someone might say, **“Well, I am not a spiritual person, so whew, I am off the hook here!”** But no! The solution is to get spiritual! The solution is to go back to **verses 22-23** of the previous chapter and to work on producing the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Nevertheless, Paul’s instruction here is primarily to those who are spiritual, as we are told to **“...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”**

We know that the Bible is a very practical book. It was written by common men who used very common and familiar words—the same words they used in their everyday lives. And from what I have read, the word that we translate here as **“restore”** has a very interesting background. Apparently, the same word was also used in the ancient world to refer to the work that fishermen would do at the end of the day as they repaired their fishing nets. In other words, they would come in off the sea, they would sort their catch, and they would sit down and very carefully repair any damage. They would **“restore”** those nets. The nets would come in with damage from being snagged on the rocks and maybe from being torn by the fish. The fishermen would **“restore”** them to like-new condition, getting those nets ready to use the next morning. The nets would be **“restored.”** The word was also used to

refer to the work of a surgeon in setting and repairing a broken bone. It might be a very painful process, but the surgeon comes in and straightens the bone and puts it in a cast. The surgeon restores the bone to its previous condition—he is restoring it, just as we are to restore a fallen brother or sister.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Gordon-Flesch Company here in Madison, and brother Mark gave me a behind-the-scenes tour of what happens in that company. As we walked through the building, I especially enjoyed seeing the repair shop, where several employees were in the process of restoring a number of copy machines. The machines in that room were valuable—they were not simply thrown away—there were thousands of dollars worth of equipment in there, but they were brought in for repairs. They were brought in to be restored. In perhaps a similar way, we are also to restore a brother or sister who has fallen, who has been *“caught”* in sin.

As I look back at these verses, I find it interesting that we are never told to minimize the seriousness of the sin. Restoring someone does not mean that we will let it slide or that we will condone the sin that they are committing. We cannot afford using the excuse of *“loving the sinner”* to ignore what the Bible teaches about sin. We may think we are being loving and tolerant, but we are doing the person no favors on the Judgment Day. Of course we must love the sinner, even if he or she is a fallen brother or sister, but we cannot simply overlook what is going on. As Jesus told the woman caught in the very act of adultery in John 8, *“I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”* Restoring someone, then, as we follow the example of Jesus, means that we will hold them accountable, that we will restore them to spiritual health—that we will encourage them to go on and sin no more.

In all things, we should remember the Golden Rule—treating others just as we ourselves would like to be treated in a similar situation. We need to look at those who are caught in any trespass just as if they were a part of our own family. If my best friend were overtaken in sin, how would I want that friend to be treated? Our first impulse should be to shield and protect that person from further injury and insult from the Devil. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, *“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* Or, as Paul puts it here in Galatians 6:1, we are to *“...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”*

**III. As we look back at Galatians 6, we see a third concept here as Paul tells us to BE CAREFUL. **

It is interesting, though, to notice exactly who Paul tells to be careful. We have a fallen Christian trapped in sin, but we have five verses of warnings not to the fallen Christian, not to the one stuck in the trap, but to those who are going in for the rescue!

In verse 1, the warning is for those who try to restore, *“...each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”* Paul wants all of us to be aware

of the danger we are in. First of all, we do not know how hard that brother or sister tried not to sin. But secondly, we do not truly know what we ourselves would have done in the same situation. As Paul said in **1 Corinthians 10:12**, ***“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”***

If you have ever taken an advanced swimming class, then you know how dangerous it is to actually try to rescue someone who is drowning. Many people have gone out to rescue someone, only to be pulled under themselves and then to have two people drown in that situation. Most swimming classes teach a method of coming up behind someone and holding them in such a way that they will not be able to pull you down. It seems there is something we can learn here in a spiritual sense. As we try to restore others, we need to be extremely careful about our own attitude. And again, this is written to those who are ***“spiritual.”*** Even those who are ***“spiritual”*** are vulnerable to Satan. I’m thinking it’s a little like driving on the ice—if we are aware of the danger hopefully we can be safer as we do it.

Another aspect of this warning to be careful is that we are to be gentle—certainly for the sake of the one being corrected. We are to show such love for the person that there is no question that our objection is to the sin and not the person. And again, we only consider the example of Jesus. Jesus very clearly condemned sin, but there was no question that Jesus loved sinful people. When Jesus came to help us, Paul said in **Philippians 2:7-8** that He ***“...emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself...”*** We, also, are to be humble. As Paul said in **2 Timothy 2:24-26**, ***“The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”*** Paul, then, tells us to be careful.

#### **IV. As we go back to Galatians 6, there is another big idea here, and that is: WE ARE COMMANDED TO BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS. »PPT»**

The word for ***“burden”*** here refers to some kind of crushing weight—a significant or oppressive weight that is difficult if not impossible to carry alone—a crushing weight that makes our knees buckle, that causes us to stumble under the pressure. We remember the parable of the workers in the vineyard who were hired at different points during the day but were all paid the same. In their complaint to the master, those who worked all day said, ***“These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day”*** (**Matthew 20:12**). The same word is used there as is used here in **Galatians 6**. Certainly in this context, the burden may refer to some kind of spiritual weakness or sin, but it would also seem to include other burdens—any kind of crushing weight—perhaps a financial need, or an illness, or some kind of emotionally draining situation.

As we think about this, we realize that in order to bear my brother's burden, I must know my brother! I must care about my brother. I must have some level of fellowship with my brother. The words of **Hebrews 10:24-25** start to make sense, ***"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."*** We should be able to say to ourselves, **"I can tell brother so-and-so has a problem, because I know brother so-and-so! I know that she is not quite right today, because I know her as my Christian sister!"**

Can you imagine Jesus meeting someone broken down in sin, being crushed by the pressing weight of guilt, someone being crushed by some pressing personal matter, and can you imagine Jesus saying, **"Good morning, good to see you, see you next week! Sure is a nice day out there!"** No! We cannot imagine Jesus doing that, so let us not do it ourselves!

We can offer a listening ear. We can offer a shoulder to cry on. We can express our sympathy. We can pray together. We can help by providing money, running errands, bringing food, doing a chore—whatever it takes to lighten someone's load. Burdens will come—poor health, trouble in a marriage, teenagers, unemployment, maybe even sin—we do not know. But the burdens will come.

And it is interesting that when we bear each others burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ. That law goes back to our Scripture reading for this morning, because in **John 13:34-35** Jesus said, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*** We find, then, that we are to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

**V. Before we leave this passage, we should notice another big idea here, and that is: WE ARE TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PICKING UP AND CARRYING OUR OWN LOAD. »PPT»**

Now at first we might say, **"Wait a minute! Didn't Paul just tell us to share the burden?"** Yes he did; however, he uses two different words here. When he tells us to bear one another's burden, he uses that word for a crushing weight, but when he tells everyone to carry their own load, he uses another word that was used to refer to a soldier's personal backpack. The word refers to something that ought to be carried—something that is within our ability to carry. In other words, all of us have personal loads that we should not pawn off on others. By the way, a Roman soldier's weapons and supplies weighed about 60 pounds. Today, as I understand it, modern soldiers are expected to carry pretty much, 60 pounds. So things haven't changed a lot over the past 2,000 years. This load is reasonable—it is nothing to whine and complain about—we are not heroic for doing it, but it is expected. We do not expect others to lift what we ourselves have the ability and responsibility to carry. And the point is: God has given all of us certain personal responsibilities that we are expected to keep up with on our own.

**Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this little paragraph, I would like for us to imagine what the church would be like if we could carry this out. **When someone is caught in sin—if those who are spiritual could restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, being careful themselves—as all of us bear each other’s heavy burdens—all the while keeping up with our own personal responsibilities.** If we could do this, I would suggest that we would come closer to Christ than we have ever been, because that is exactly what Jesus did for us. When we were broken down under the crushing weight of sin, Jesus came into the world, He took on our burden and He carried it to the cross. As Paul wrote in **Romans 5:8**, **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** In all humility, God took the burden of sin away forever. This morning, then, let us look around. Do we know people who may be slipping away into sin? Do we know people who are being crushed under some pressing weight? Paul would encourage us to reach out and share that burden.

On the other hand, maybe you are the one being crushed. We would encourage you to let someone know about it. Every Sunday morning, we offer the invitation of Christ. It is an invitation for those who are not yet Christians to obey the gospel—an encouragement to turn away from sin and an invitation to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. But the invitation is also a call for those who are in need to bring their burdens to all of us as the Lord’s church so that we can share those burdens. We would invite you to lean on your Christian family for support. If you have something we need to pray about as a group, we would be glad to do that. If you are burdened down—either with a sin or a situation—we want to know about it. Write it down and pass it forward—let us know about it. **The only thing worse than someone drowning at a lifeguard party would be someone in this room either going home in a lost condition or going home as a Christian under a crushing weight.** If you have a prayer request or if you would like to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

**“Let Him Have His Way with Thee”**

**Would you live for Jesus and be always pure and good?  
 Would you walk with Him within the narrow road?  
 Would you have Him bear your burden, carry all your load?  
 Let Him have His way with Thee!**

**His pow’r can make you what you ought to be;  
 His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free;  
 His love can fill your soul, and you will see  
 ‘Twas best for Him to have his way with thee.**

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)