

# GALATIANS

## Chapter 6

### *Bear One Another's Burdens*

**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load. 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he 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 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

**6:1-10** One of the attractions of the rivals' teaching at Galatia was the concrete direction they were providing for the Christian life through Moses' Law. Even today many Christians yearn for concrete direction in their lives (as Christian bookstores attest). As an alternative, Paul offers living or walking according to the Spirit's lead (5:16, 18, 25). The fruit of the Spirit that he lists—love, joy, peace, etc. (5:22–23)—may not seem particularly concrete in practical application. Paul comes the closest to offering specific instructions on how to live in 6:1–10, but even here his comments merely hint at a more comprehensive approach. This section of the letter consists of a series of maxims revolving around the motifs of doing good rather than evil (6:1, 2, 8, 9, 10) and of helping others, especially those in the household of faith (6:1, 3, 4, 7, 8). Paul refuses to replace Moses' Law with yet another legal system. Those seeking a new law will not find it here. The Spirit's fruit gives shape to the Christian life. The fruit of "gentleness" (5:23), for instance, expresses itself when believers restore one another "with the Spirit of gentleness" (6:1). The Law in the hands of Christ (6:2) expresses itself in "love" (5:14), the Spirit's fruit (5:22). The fruit of "self-control" (5:23) expresses itself when a Christian does not boast and bears his or her own load (6:4–5). "Forbearance" or patience (5:22) expresses itself with persistence in what is good (6:9). The fruit of "goodness" or "generosity" (5:22) results in the sharing of material blessings (6:6, 9–10). A Christian's actions will be consistent with the Spirit's fruit. (CC)

Christian love expresses itself in slavery toward others (5:13–15). The Galatian "brothers (and sisters)" (6:1) are to act in a fitting and generous manner toward family members (6:10). Gal 6:1–10 demonstrates again that those led by the Spirit will live connected to a community of fellow believers. A Christian at a distance cannot bear another's burdens or share material benefits. A believer with no contact with others of the faith cannot restore another in "the Spirit of gentleness" (6:1). An "isolated Christian" is a contradiction in terms. Pastors are right to admonish those who refuse to attend Christian worship and who refuse to work with their fellow believers. Indeed, pastors and other Christians *must* admonish those who choose to isolate themselves. Believers need each other! An unnecessary side effect of the Reformation emphasis on justification before God has been a tendency to stress the individual at the expense of the community that God, by faith, has drawn together. The preaching of God's Word, Baptism, the Eucharist—the means of grace—are all corporate affairs. Paul explains in his letter to the Romans that Christian faith is not possible apart from the messengers who deliver the Gospel message (Rom 10:14–17). The Galatian Christians have been *set apart* from this present evil age (Gal 1:4). Israel of mere flesh must yield to the corporate "Israel of God" (6:16). Christ must be formed *in their midst*

(4:19). Again, note the plural Greek pronoun “in *you*” (ἐν ὑμῖν) in 4:19: Christ is formed within the Christian community! (CC)

The corporate dimension of the Christian life is inescapable. Gal 6:1–10 neatly alternates between individual accountability and corporate responsibility:

- 6:1a: corporate responsibility—“you ... restore” (plural forms) the transgressor
- 6:1b: individual accountability—“watching yourself” (singular forms)
- 6:2: corporate responsibility—“bear” (plural imperative) one another’s burdens
- 6:3–5: individual accountability—“each” must “examine his own work” and “bear his own load” (singular forms)
- 6:6: corporate responsibility—the pupil supports his teacher
- 6:7–8: individual accountability—how “a person” “sows” is how he or she “will reap” (singular forms)
- 6:9–10: corporate responsibility—“we” Christians should do good to all, especially to fellow believers (CC)

Paul regularly points to Christ as an example or pattern for Christian behavior (Rom 15:1–3, 7–9a; Phil 1:27–2:11; 1 Thess 1:6). Paul bears “the marks of Jesus” in his body (Gal 6:17). God revealed his Son *in* Paul (1:15–16), and so to receive Paul is to receive Christ Jesus (4:14). Even as Christ became as we are (4:4), so also *I* have been crucified, says Paul in 2:19–20; 6:14. The Galatians should therefore become *as Paul* (4:12; also 1 Cor 11:1). Those who belong to Christ *crucified* the flesh (5:24). As Richard Hays observed: “Paul holds himself up to [the Galatians] as a mirror in which they may see Christ’s self-sacrificial love and faithfulness reflected.” Since Christ lives *in* the Christian (2:19–20), the Christian’s life by faith always has a Christ-like shape. Likewise, the corporate life of the believing community takes the form of Jesus Christ himself. After all, the believer bears the fruit of the Spirit *of Christ* (4:6). Certainly the Christian cannot die on a cross for the sake of sinful humanity as did Christ, but Paul sees Christ’s selfless sacrifice as a paradigm for behavior within the community of faith as Christ is formed in their midst (4:19). The preaching of Christ’s saving work *for* the believer must never overlook Christ’s sanctifying activity *in* and *with* the believer. Christians share in the wonderful blessings of their Lord, a Lord who remains active in the lives of his dear people! (CC)

In an increasingly materialistic world, modern Christians must take seriously the financial self-sacrifice that faith in Christ entails. In the book of Acts Luke narrates how the first Christians would even sell *their homes* for the sake of the welfare of other members of their community. The Roman Empire did not offer its inhabitants a social security system. That rendered the plight of widows or orphans or others with no remaining family members even more precarious. Paul would certainly agree with Luke that Christian self-sacrifice includes a willingness to provide financially for the welfare of less-advantaged community members (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37; 6:1–2; 11:27–30). A Greek-speaking person in the first century would likely have noticed in Gal 6:1–10 the sheer volume of words regularly used in financial contexts:

1. “overtake” (προλαμβάνω, 6:1)—for money received or given as a retainer
2. “transgression” (παράπτωμα, 6:1)—an error in the payment amount
3. “bear” (βαστάζω, 6:2, 5)—assuming someone’s indebtedness or enduring taxation
4. “burden” (βάρος, 6:2)—financial burdens, whether taxes or oppression (half of all usages); the singular form occurs in the B text of Judg 18:21 for “riches, abundance”; Sirach 13:2 uses it in relation to money and wealth; five or six of the eleven other instances of this word and its cognates in the Pauline corpus have a financial sense (2 Cor 11:9 [note the immediate context]; 12:16; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8–9; 1 Tim 5:16; cf. 1 Thess 2:7)
5. “fulfill” (ἀναπληρόω, 6:2)—pay in full, fulfill a contract, make up a debt
6. “examine” (δοκιμάζω, 6:4)—testing the genuineness of metals and coins (cf. LXX Prov 8:10; 17:3; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.7.6)

7. “work” (ἔργον, 6:4)—trade or commerce (cf. ἐργάζομαι, “to work,” in Rev 18:17)
8. “load” (φορτίον, 6:5)—freight, cargo, wares, merchandise
9. “share” (κοινωνέω, 6:6)—sharing in common a financial burden or material resources (Phil 4:14–15; Barn. 19:8; cf. also Acts 2:42–46; 4:32–35)
10. “Word” (λόγος, 6:6)—an account, as of expenses (cf. Phil 4:14–15)
11. “sow” (σπείρω, 6:7–8) and “reap” (θερίζω, 6:7–9)—in financial contexts elsewhere in Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:10–11; 2 Cor 9:6)
12. “proper time” or “opportunity” (καιρός, 6:9–10)—the time when a payment was due

Although Paul is clearly concerned with financial benevolence in some of these verses, he casts the net more widely in others to include failings of a more general moral nature. Nevertheless, genuine care for others must also include a willingness to share of one’s wealth. How many modern Christians come close to the ten percent tithe of OT believers? Why would Spirit-led people not *exceed* the requirement of Moses’ Law in whatever is necessary for the welfare of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? (CC)

**6:1** ἐὰν καί (“if ... nevertheless”)—The καί is intensive. The sense is identical to 1 Cor 7:11, in which Paul is emphasizing a protasis that should *not* occur: “if *indeed* she separates” from her husband. The sense is the same here: if an individual “indeed” or “nevertheless” transgresses.

ἄνθρωπος (“an individual”)—Some manuscripts (e.g., Ψ syr<sup>h</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup>) add ἐξ ὑμῶν (“among you”) after ἄνθρωπος. This change emphasizes the generic nature of the noun ἄνθρωπος here (“someone/anyone”) and may reflect the scribes’ understanding of the admonitions as directed to the Galatians (“among you”). P and syr<sup>pesh</sup> substitute τις ἐξ ὑμῶν (“any one of you”) for ἄνθρωπος; the rationale would be the same as for the addition of ἐξ ὑμῶν. These variations were likely prompted by Paul’s use of the generic “individual” (ἄνθρωπος) rather than the familial “brother” (ἀδελφός) so frequent elsewhere in the letter and even at the beginning of the verse. The changes reflect the scribes’ recognition that Paul is referring not just to anyone but to the community’s members.<sup>4</sup>

σκοπῶν σεαυτὸν (“while watching yourself”)—The participle and pronoun are singular, even though the verb the participle modifies and its emphatic subject pronoun are plural (ὁμεῖς ... καταρτίζετε, “you ... restore”). Paul is emphasizing “you [plural] *each*.” (CC)

*Brothers (and sisters), if an individual is nevertheless overtaken in some transgression, you who are Spiritual restore such a one with the Spirit of gentleness while watching yourself lest you also be tempted.* Paul’s address of the audience as “brothers (and sisters)” signals a new section of the letter (cf. 3:15; 4:12; 5:13; and the weaker rhetorical break in 4:28). At the same time, this new section builds on the immediately preceding admonitions in 5:26 against conceit and envy. “If nevertheless” (ἐὰν καί, as here, or εἰ καί) elsewhere in Paul’s letters always develops in some way an element of the preceding sentence. Gal 6:1–10 as a section therefore offers practical advice that will guard against conceit by a proper self-evaluation and against envy through self-sacrificial relationships with other people. (CC)

The address of the audience as “brothers (and sisters)” (ἀδελφοί, 6:1) reminds the Galatians that they belong to the household of the faith (6:10). Paul therefore addresses 6:1 to “brothers (and sisters)” in the context of the “we” who “live by the Spirit” (5:25–26); they are not rivals. Their behavior will reflect their mutual membership in the family of God. Christians *are* their brothers’ and sisters’ keepers! (CC)

The verb Paul employs in the protasis of his third class conditional sentence, “be overtaken” or “caught” (προλαμβάνω), is ambiguous. The passive form of this verb is used nowhere else in the NT. Some commentators have contended that Paul is referring to an individual being caught off guard by a false step or blunder (NEB; cf. Wis Sol 17:17). In that case, Paul would be avoiding the notion of deliberate sin. He would be writing of people being *overtaken* by transgression. Others think that the verb refers to an individual being *discovered* or caught in the act of some transgression (cf. Jn 8:3–4). One could perhaps

avoid the problem posed by the ambiguity with the translation “caught,” which could refer both to being unexpectedly detected in sin by a fellow Christian and to being taken by surprise by the transgression itself.<sup>34</sup> Paul expresses concern that the brother or sister who is assisting the fallen might “also” (καί) be overtaken by temptation to transgress. Although the verb “caught” or “be overtaken” (προλαμβάνω) itself is ambiguous, the participial clause at the end of 6:1 demonstrates that Paul probably does not have in mind the notion of being caught in the act of transgression. The point of comparison (καί) between the one who assists and the one who has fallen is not that they are both caught in the act of sin but that they are both in danger of, or have been overtaken by, transgression. “Be overtaken” is therefore the preferred translation. (CC)

Paul admonishes that if an individual is overtaken “in some transgression,” that individual should be restored by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ’s household. The appearance of the word “transgression” in 6:1 is striking since Paul often uses this word (παράπτωμα) in the context of Moses’ Law (Rom 5:13–15, 20; see also the synonym παράβασις, “transgression,” in Gal 3:19). Up to this point in Galatians Paul has been consistently negative about the Law. No sooner does Paul use the word “transgression,” which brings to mind Moses’ Law, when he uses the phrase “the Law of Christ” in 6:2: the Law in the hands of Christ. Christ has grabbed hold of the Law of Moses and provided the definitive perspective. Indeed, as Christ says in Matthew’s Gospel: “If your brother [fellow Christian] sins [against you], go and reprove him, only between you and him. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother” (Mt 18:15). Paul has in mind *any* transgression; the word “some” (τινι) prevents a limitation to financial concerns. Paul envisions any sort of “*false step*” (παράπτωμα) that stands in the way of *walking* by the Spirit (5:25)—note the play on these words’ meanings. (CC)

The word “transgression” in 6:1 may be significant in another regard as well. In their pagan pasts the Galatians had been wary of transgressing against their gods. The propitiatory inscriptions that have survived from throughout Asia Minor betray an obsession for identifying and performing the proper cultic rituals to restore the relationship with the gods in the wake of transgression. Paul proclaims a different route. Ritual remedies are no longer necessary, whether pagan rituals or the rituals of Moses’ Law. The Galatian brothers and sisters may use their freedom responsibly by reaching out in love to fellow family members in the faith. (CC)

Paul requests that “you, the Spiritual ones” (ὁμεῖς οἱ πνευματικοί) act to restore the transgressing brother or sister. This turn to “you who are Spiritual” is capable of a number of interpretations. Paul has employed the plural “you” throughout the letter for the Galatian recipients as a whole. That does not mean that he cannot by “the Spiritual ones” be referring to a group *within* “you” Galatians, but the pattern of usage of the second person plural pronouns to refer to the Galatian Christians as a whole renders reference to a subgroup less likely. Paul reminds the Galatian congregations of their experience of the Spirit in 3:2–5 and, throughout Galatians 5, admonishes the congregations to walk by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and to keep in step with the Spirit (5:16, 18, 25). They are a people in whom the Spirit works fruit (5:22–23) and for whom the Spirit combats the flesh (5:17). After Galatians 5 the Christ-believing audience would surely recognize *themselves* in “you, the Spiritual ones.” Indeed, in 6:8 each of them must sow to the Spirit. Since they *all* have experienced the Spirit, Paul is not likely referring only to a leadership contingent who should be taking action against sin. Paul will struggle mightily against the notion of Spiritual “haves” versus “have-nots” in his Corinthian correspondence. (CC)

Some have further hypothesized that Paul is turning to a “pneumatic” faction, a group who claimed the Spirit as a sort of title. The apostle’s use of the term “Spiritual ones” in that case would be sarcastic. The problem with this hypothesis is that he does not use the term in any obvious sarcastic sense. His tone is matter of fact, if not friendly. The letter does not otherwise betray factions at Galatia beyond the obvious division between the Galatians and the teachers of the Law who have entered their midst. Paul also is not using the language to distinguish between those who follow his Christ-centered teaching and those who

are succumbing to the Law. One does not find in 6:1 the contrast between the “Spiritual” and the “fleshly” that one finds in a passage such as 1 Cor 3:1. No, Paul appeals to *all* of the Galatian Christians based on their mutual experience of the Spirit in 3:2–5 and 4:6–10. He does not speak of “*those* [i.e., the few] who are Spiritual” but rather “*you* who are Spiritual.” Paul wants the Galatians to view themselves as “Spirit people” rather than as a people oriented around Moses’ Law. Incidentally, Paul is not using “spiritual” in the ambiguous, modern sense of the term as applied to adherents of any religion; Paul always means “Spiritual”—those who possess the Spirit of Christ. There is no sense of elitism here, only that the Galatian Christians are a different sort of people. Gal 6:1’s address to the “Spiritual” reinforces the point. (CC)

Of course, to say that Paul is addressing the congregations as a whole does not mean that he envisions them descending upon the poor, unsuspecting transgressor *en masse* (6:1). Congregation members have a responsibility toward their brothers and sisters that requires those who are closest to the situation of transgression to address the matter. The “Spiritual” must “restore” the brother or sister overtaken in transgression (cf. the same verb, καταρτίζω, “restore,” in Mk 1:19 for the mending of nets, and in 1 Cor 1:10 for restoring unity to the community). The present tense of the Greek imperative “restore” (καταρτίζετε) may be interpreted in a number of ways. Perhaps Paul envisions an iterative sense, that is, repeated instances of this restoration. Perhaps Paul thinks such correction may take some time, a continuous sense. Whatever the exact sense, the apostle recognizes that perfection of behavior will not be a reality even in Christian communities. What should distinguish Christian communities is the genuine concern that “such a one” (ὁ τοιοῦτος) be corrected when in transgression. “Such a one” may allude to (the neuter plural of) the same term in 5:21: “those who do *such things* [τὰ τοιαῦτα],” who continue in the works of the flesh, thereby jeopardize their inheritance in the kingdom of God. Correction from church-family members may prevent transgressors from losing or giving up their salvation. (CC)

Too often Christians seize upon the faults of other believers. Gatherings of believers must discipline themselves to prevent faultfinding about other Christians from prevailing. Negativism does not reflect the Spirit’s fruit. Christians do not exult in transgression; they, with all due humility, actively seek the betterment of their fellow family members. Transgression requires constructive effort and engagement, not easy critique and faultfinding. (CC)

Christians must also discipline themselves to *remain approachable* for such correction through the Lord’s instruments. God alone lives in “unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). Luther agreed with Augustine, who taught that when believers treat the sins of others properly they prove themselves “spiritual” men or women. Unfortunately, such vitally necessary church discipline has become sorely lacking in most modern churches. The individual believer and the gatherings of believers always bear responsibility! A “live and let live” attitude will not do, lest the disease spread without the requisite, regular spiritual surgery. Transgression is a cancer that can affect the entire assembly of believers. For instance, a basal cell carcinoma that grows very slowly on the scalp of balding men is quite treatable if diagnosed early. The doctor simply cuts off the growth. Ignored, this slow-growing cancer eventually spreads and proves fatal. When Christians witness sin, they need to engage themselves and address it. They must, with due courage and love, *act*, as difficult as that may be and regardless of the potential repercussions. Such an approach to discipline requires discipline, if the pun may be permitted. (CC)

Paul’s (and Jesus’) concern with mutual correction is consistent with the Jewish milieu of early Christianity. The Qumran covenanters wrote in their *Rule of the Community* (1QS V.24–VI.1): “Each should reproach his fellow in truth, in meekness and in compassionate love for the man. No-one should speak to his brother in anger ..., but instead reproach him that day so as not to incur a sin for his fault” (trans. García Martínez). The following section (1QS VI.1, 24–VII.27) of the Qumran *Rule of the Community* describes the process when discipline must involve the full community (cf. Jesus’ instructions in Mt 18:15–20; see also Lev 19:17; Ezek 3:17–21; Pss 51:13 [MT 51:15]; 141:4; Lk 17:3–4; 2 Cor 2:5–

11; James 5:19–20). The Jews and the first Christians recognized that sin can only be effectively combatted with the help of others (cf. 2 *Clem.* 17.1–2). No Christian can afford to live apart from regular interaction with, and help from, other Christians. Christians *are* their brothers’ and sisters’ keepers! (CC)

At the same time, “such a one” should be corrected “with the Spirit of gentleness” (ἐν πνεύματι πραΰτητος, 6:1). Most commentators have concluded that a “spirit of gentleness” refers to the regenerated human spirit and not to the Holy Spirit, despite the Spirit’s prominence throughout Galatians 5 (e.g., 5:16–18, 22–23, 25). Few would dispute that this “gentleness” is a result of the Spirit and is not possible otherwise. The Spirit’s fruit must express itself in the human spirit. On the other hand, “gentleness” (πραΰτης) in 5:23 is no mere human disposition or attitude, but the fruit of the Spirit *of God*. Throughout 6:1–10 Paul is directly applying 5:13–26, and especially the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23), to the Galatian congregations and their situation. Such considerations therefore favor “with the Spirit of gentleness.” Paul is employing a play on words: “The spirit of humility is, as it were, the humility of the Spirit.”<sup>53</sup> Those who offer correction must avoid insensitive conceit (5:26) and instead manifest a “meek and lowly” Christ-like pattern of behavior (Mt 11:29; 2 Cor 10:1). (CC)

Paul issues a serious qualification to his instructions when he warns that the one who admonishes is vulnerable to transgression as well: Watch yourself! (6:2). The *singular* participle “while watching” (σκοπῶν) and second person *singular* pronoun “yourself” (σεαυτόν) contrast with the preceding second person *plural* pronoun and imperative, “you ... restore” (ὁμεῖς ... καταρτίζετε). The singular qualification reminds each Galatian believer to keep an eye on *himself or herself*. Those who attempt to correct others must themselves guard against temptation, “lest you also be tempted” (μὴ καὶ σὺ πειρασθῇς). Correction can all too easily turn to conceit. Paul had just warned against the very real danger of pride (5:25–26). “Thank God I’m not like that person!” (cf. Lk 18:11–12). Although a concern with pride is clear in the immediate context, the possibility cannot be ruled out that Paul is concerned that those admonishing may find themselves vulnerable to the very same transgression against which they are warning. In either case, the necessary practice of mutual correction is dangerous for the incautious. (CC)

*you who are spiritual.* Contrast with 1Co 3:1–3. (CSB)

Greek pneumatikos, possible congregational leaders. However, all Christians have the Spirit (cf 3:2-5, 14; 4:6), not just a select few or elite few. They follow the Spirits leading by gently and humbly caring for the who lapses into some sin. (TLSB)

*restore.* The Greek for this verb is used elsewhere for setting bones, mending nets, or bringing factions together. (CSB)

“To put back into former condition” (e.g., fishing nets, Mt 4:21; Mk 1:19). “Even though we have sins, the <grace of the> Holy Spirit does not allow them to harm us. For we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but <continuous, uninterrupted> forgiveness of sin” (LC II 55). (TLSB)

“Restore,” I learn, is a translation of the Greek word “kataritzo,” which in Paul’s day was a medical term meaning “to mend” or “to set bone,” an action requiring great skill. (Startled by Silence – Senter p. 43)

Now, he puts those on the table again. It's another hinge is really what it is between the catalog of vices and the fruits of the Spirit. And now what he's going to say in Chapter 6 regarding burdens. And in the very first verse of Chapter 6, Paul recognizes that even though Christ is in us, even though our communities are marked by the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit are to live in us, we still live in a fallen world. That we are still infected with the virus of sin. And we still are broken people. (Just – V-40)

We still live in a world that is broken. Think of it this way: That there's like a cloud that is over us. And Christians still sin. Original sin still is in their bodies. They still have outbursts of the flesh. Envy. Even sins that we would consider to be you know somewhat horrendous public since, adultery, stealing, murder, breaking of the Ten Commandments. As Jesus said, we not only do it in our actions, we do it in our very thoughts. Just simply lusting after a woman is like breaking the Sixth Commandment. This is our nature that we still live in a body, we still live in a world, that is infected with a virus. (Just – V-40)

Now, Luther used to talk about it in this way: That we are at the same time saint and sinner. That there is this tension. And here is I think a key to Lutheran theology. And I just heard this expression the other day. I think I've always talked about it. But I've never thought about it this way. And it's been very helpful. We get into trouble theologically when we see he it's either/or. It's either the Spirit or it's the flesh. And in a way it sounds like that's what Paul is saying. But it's not. Because Paul is a realist. He knows the real world in which we live is a world in which Christ is present with his gifts. And the Spirit is reigning. And that the triumph is already here in Christ. Yes, it is. And we live in that. That's why we're resurrected beings. But we also know we live in a world broken by sin. So it's never an either/or. It's always a both/and. Lutherans live in a both/and world. Now, don't ask me to explain that. That's why we sometimes resort to mystery. The fact that we live at the same time as saint and sinner is a great mystery. The fact that we live as saint and sinner, we are still triumphing in Christ is a mystery. Because we are plagued by the impulsive desires of the flesh. And sometimes they break out. Even in communities constituted by the Spirit. Even among us who are Christians. (Just – V-40)

Now, we're not quite sure what the Greek means here in it's fullness, to be overtaken. To be caught up in a transgression. Some people say this is like an addiction. But I think it's really much simpler than that. That each and every one of us at various points in our lives see that the impulsive desire of the flesh breaks out. Sometimes it breaks out in action. Where we affect people. You know, you can think of various situations in your own life or in your own experience where this has happened. More often than not, it happens in our minds. It happens in our discontent or in the hidden life that we live. It happens in the way in which we feel about people or we hold in resentments or we hold in lust or whatever into our own minds. What Paul is saying here is that when this happens, and it happens, take heed to yourself lest it happen to you, that you, too, be tempted. What communities that are constituted by the Spirit do is they are merciful, they are forgiving, they are compassionate, they are loving. I think that's one of the most extraordinary statements here where he says: You who are spiritual. You who are marked by the Spirit. Where the Spirit is living in you. Remember he says if you live by the Spirit and you do walk in the Spirit. That doesn't mean that you live a moral, perfect life. But you're a forgiving, loving, compassionate, really merciful person. You're characterized by these fruits of the Spirit of Christ. And if you are one who is spiritual -- and this is such an important statement -- you restore, you bring back the one who has fallen in the spirit of gentleness. (Just – V-40)

*keep watch on yourself...be tempted* – This is a rather serious warning. Its purpose is to put down the harshness and cruelty of those who do not cheer and restore the lapsed. “There is no sin,” says Augustine, “that one man has committed that another man could not commit.” We are living on a slippery place; therefore if we become proud and forsake good order, it will be easier for us to fall than to stand. Therefore that man spoke rightly in *The Lives of the Fathers* when the report was brought to him that one of the brothers had fallen into fornication. “Yesterday it was he,” he said, “and today it could be I.”

**6:2 ἀναπληρώσετε** (“you will fulfill”)—This future indicative is supported by B F G co Marcion Cyprian (P<sup>46</sup> has the future indicative ἀποπληρώσετε, “you will complete, satisfy, fulfill”). The aorist imperative ἀναπληρώσατε has strong support in X A C D Ψ 0122 M Clement. The aorist imperative is likely a scribal conformation of the future tense verb to the preceding imperatives καταρτίζετε (6:1) and βαστάζετε (6:2). Paul’s choice of a verb with a prepositional prefix (ἀνα-) may be for the sake of intensification: the Galatians will thoroughly or completely fulfill the Law of Christ. No more would be

required of them. The verb is an indicative (“will”) and *not* an imperative and thus expresses the sure result of Christian behavior. (CC)

*Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the Law of Christ.* Sin has an inevitable tendency to compound itself with further difficulties and issues as it bears its own sort of fruit. Sometimes the burdens that individuals carry can be personally overwhelming. So Paul admonishes the Galatians in 6:2 to “bear one another’s burdens” (cf. the very similar admonition in Rom 15:1–2). Paul’s “bear” (βαστάζετε) is not in the sense of “to tolerate” or “to put up with” but rather in the sense of doing something that may be inconvenient and that may involve some effort. Bearing burdens was the task of a slave. Paul has just admonished the Galatians to be enslaved to each other in love (5:13). Paradoxically, those free in Christ bear the burdens of others. Did not Christ do the same on behalf of those burdened under the Law and its curse (3:13; 4:4–5)? Christ sacrificed himself to free others from “the present evil age” (1:4). Was Christ not the ultimate burden-bearer? The Christ-like shape of Christian behavior is inescapable. The one who became a curse “for us” (ὕπὲρ ἡμῶν, 3:13) now empowers us by his Spirit to live for the benefit and welfare of others. Christians will be a countercultural people in the midst of a “me-centered” world. Christians do not exist in autonomous isolation but remain outwardly and otherworldly focused (5:13). (CC)

Bearing burdens (6:2) is a slave’s chore (5:13–14)! The believer is to be a slave to others. The apostle would have the Galatians cultivate that mindset in their conduct. He places “one another” (ἀλλήλων) first in the Greek sentence for emphasis. The emphasis on mutual service has been building to this point. Paul uses the reciprocal pronoun “one another” (ἀλλήλων) with negative verbs in 5:15 and 5:26 (twice in each verse): the Galatians must not bite and devour “one another” lest they be consumed by “one another” (5:15); they should not provoke “one another” or envy “one another” (5:26). Instead, as Paul recommends in 5:13–14, in love they should become slaves to “one another” (ἀλλήλοις). Although Paul does not explicitly connect 6:2 to 6:1, surely one means of bearing other people’s burdens (6:2) is the assistance that Christians provide in helping restore brothers and sisters from transgression (6:1). (CC)

When Paul admonishes the Galatians to “bear one another’s burdens,” he may be drawing on a maxim common in his day. Menander quipped: “Accept the misfortunes of your friends as your own”; “accept all burdens among friends as common.” Xenophon reported Socrates as saying: “One must share one’s burdens with one’s friends, for possibly we may do something to ease you.”<sup>62</sup> The contexts of the popular maxim and Paul’s context, however, are radically different. Paul would include not only financial assistance but also help in addressing moral weaknesses and failures (as in 6:1). Further, the apostle’s inspiration is not a Greco-Roman *topos* on friendship, but rather the death and resurrection of God’s own Son who “gave himself for me” (2:19–20)! The cross remains central not only to the Christian’s salvation but also to the Christian life. (CC)

In this manner (οὕτως, “so, thus”), that is, in mutual burden-bearing, “you will fulfill the Law of Christ” (6:2). The exact meaning of “the Law of Christ” (τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ) has been hotly debated. One proposal is that Paul is drawing on the Jewish concept of a messianic age with a reinterpreted or modified Torah. W. D. Davies, who championed this approach, recognized that the evidence is “not impressive” and “ambiguous.” The Jewish texts Davies cited are from several centuries after the origin of Christianity and may well reflect Christian influence. The concept of a messianic Torah is absent in Second Temple texts contemporaneous to or antedating Christianity. (CC)

A second proposal is that Paul is referring to “the Law of Christ” as a distinctively new legal code that should be distinguished from the Torah of Moses. Paul does at various points ground his ethical instruction in the sayings of Jesus (see, for instance, Romans 12–13; Colossians 3; 1 Thessalonians 4–5). Perhaps Paul is treating Jesus as a new lawgiver. C. H. Dodd contended that the similar phrase “in/with the Law of Christ” (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ) in 1 Cor 9:21 refers to the commands of Christ (in 1 Cor 7:10 and



9:14), which Christians must obey. In this scenario, Paul’s teaching in Gal 6:2 would be grounded in “the law of Christ,” perhaps the instruction of Mt 18:15–20 on handling a neighbor’s sin. The parallels with Mt 18:15 are not exact, and not all are convinced of the allusion. Others discern allusions in Gal 6:2 (“bear [βαστάζετε] one another’s *burdens* [τὰ βάρη]”) and Gal 6:5 (“each one shall *bear* [βαστάσει] his own *load* [τὸ ... φορτίον]”) to “the law of Christ” in Mt 11:30, “my *load* [τὸ φορτίον] is light,” and Mt 23:4, “they tie up *burdensome loads* [φορτία βαρέα], hard to *bear* [δυσβάστακτα].” Despite Paul’s use of the identical word “load” (φορτίον, Gal 6:5) and similar words for “bear” and “burdens,” the contexts for these words in Matthew are very different. The very fact that Paul merely alludes to—and does not quote verbatim—Jesus’ teaching suggests that he does not want to treat Jesus’ sayings as yet a new set of rules. For Jesus’ teaching to become a new Law would leave Paul aghast. Jesus is not a second Moses; he is the Galatians’ Deliverer (1:4)! (CC)

A third, rather popular proposal is to translate the disputed phrase “the Law of Christ” instead as “the principle of Christ.” Paul would be expressing a sort of play on words: for a people so absorbed with Moses’ Law, they should consider instead the “law” of Christ. Let Christ be the norm or principle that governs their life, not Moses’ Law. Paul’s formulation would be deliberately ironic. Too many problems, however, prevent this approach from being persuasive. Each of the thirty-two instances of the word “Law” (νόμος) in Galatians up to this point refers to Moses’ Law. That consistent usage creates a burden of proof for a departure from the pattern. Further, 6:2 must be understood in connection with 5:13–14. In both passages Paul speaks of mutual obligation or service: “serve one another” (δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις, 5:13); “bear one another’s burdens” (ἀλλήλων τὰ βάρη βαστάζετε, 6:2). Both verses employ the reciprocal pronoun “one another” (ἀλλήλοις; ἀλλήλων) in a positive sense. Both employ a verbal form of “fulfill” (πληρώω): “is fulfilled” (πεπλήρωται, 5:14); “you will fulfill” (ἀναπληρώσετε, 6:2). Both verses employ that “fulfill” (πληρώω) language in relation to “Law” (νόμος). Even as Paul refers to the Mosaic Law in 5:14, he must be referring to the Mosaic Law in 6:2. (CC)

Up to this point Paul has been consistent in treating the Law and Christ as opposing approaches to a relationship with God. The conjunction of the “Law” and “Christ” here is rhetorically striking. A fourth proposal, then, is that Paul is co-opting a phrase used by the rival teachers: “the Law of Christ.” Perhaps this was the terminology of the opponents as they contended for compatibility between Moses’ and Jesus’ teachings. Had this phrase been Paul’s own language, he would surely have used it earlier in the epistle or prepared for its usage here. (CC)

On the other hand, had Paul been undercutting his rivals’ choice of language, he would probably have been clearer about his intentions. Paul volunteers a rather similar phrase for *his own* teaching in a far less polemical setting (“in/with the Law of Christ,” ἐν νόμῳ Χριστοῦ, 1 Cor 9:21)! The phrasing of 1 Cor 9:21 indicates that Paul may well have coined the language of Gal 6:2 himself. Similarly vexing formulations are frequent throughout Romans: “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), “the Law of works” (Rom 3:27), “the Law of faith” (Rom 3:27). In these formulations Paul could just as easily appear to *affirm* the Law as he could reject it. Certainly after his vigorous attempts earlier in Galatians to sever the rivals’ association of faith in Christ with Law observance, the apostle’s turn of phrase here, combining the Law and Christ, is eye-catching. Nevertheless, the content with which Paul fills the phrase is his own and reflects his apocalyptic perspective: *the Law in the hands of Christ*. The Law in the hands of Christ does *not* require the gentiles to be circumcised. (CC)

Paul regularly employs genitival modifiers alongside νόμος (“Law”) to indicate the power that holds sway over the Law. In the realm of sin, the Law works death: hence “the Law of sin and death” in Rom 8:2; cf. Rom 7:21, 23. The Spirit can grab hold of the Law with a very different result: thus “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). The real power is that which takes hold of the Law. The Law itself is powerless. In Gal 6:2 Christ is the one whose power is at work as the Law is understood through the lens of Christ’s self-sacrifice (1:4; 2:20). Christians therefore fulfill Moses’ Law in a Christ-like love in 5:13–

14. Jesus often summarized the Law through the command to love (Lev 19:18; see Mt 19:19; Mt 22:39 || Mk 12:31; cf. Mt 7:12; Lk 10:27). Bearing one another's burdens in Gal 6:1 finds a parallel in Rom 15:1–3, a passage in which the strong “bear” (βαστάζω, as in Gal 6:2, 5) the weaknesses of the weak since Christ did not please himself. Christ-like, self-sacrificing love becomes the means by which Moses' Law is fulfilled. No one should therefore charge the Galatian Christians with “Lawlessness.” As Christians bear one another's burdens, they more than sufficiently satisfy the Law as understood through the lens of Christ's self-sacrifice. No more is required of them. “The Mosaic law ... comes to its fullest and proper expression in the relationships of mutual service within the community of those whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of Christ in conformity to the character of the faithful life of Christ.” (CC)

The reference in 6:2 to the Mosaic Law from the vantage point of Christ's saving work implies that the apostle has not utterly jettisoned the Law in every respect (cf. 5:13–14). Christians may not set about to “do” the Law, but they “fulfill” it by living in and through Christ and his Spirit. The Law may still function as a standard for human behavior that is fulfilled by those in Christ. Paul may therefore appeal to the Law in other contexts as a warrant for proper Christian behavior (e.g., Rom 12:19; 1 Cor 5:1–5; 6:1–6, 9–10, 12–20; 2 Cor 8:15). This is what the Formula of Concord called “the third use of the Law” (FC Ep and SD VI). Those scholars who opt to take νόμος more generally as “principle” frequently see no continuing role for the Law in the Christian life in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Interpretive choices can have profound doctrinal implications—a reminder of the necessity of careful biblical work behind any attempt at a larger, systematic synthesis. (CC)

*bear one another's burdens.* The emphasis is on moral burdens or weaknesses (see v.1; Ro 15:1–3). (CSB)

Specifically, loads that temptations and sin bring upon fellow Christians (v. 1) but, in principle, all burdens. (TLSB)

You know Luther had a beautiful example of this when he talked about the Lord's Supper. He said: When you come to the Supper of the Lord, what you do is you come with all your sins, with all your burdens, with all your transgressions, all those impulsive desires of the flesh that have plagued you all week, all the darkness, all of the demons that are plagued you. And you come forward to the altar and you lay them all there for Jesus to bear. You just lay them there. And then you receive that extraordinary refreshing gift of forgiveness and love and mercy in eating and drinking the very body and blood of Christ shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. But when you're there at the altar, you pick up the burdens of those who are marked by the Spirit, those in the congregation who are bringing their burdens forward. And you help them as a member of the community in Christ to bear the burdens. That's what Paul means here. Bear each other's burdens. (Just – V-40)

*law of Christ.* Love (Lv 19:18; cf. Jn 15:12), fulfilled through Christ's sacrificial death (1:4; 2:20). Christians “through love serve one another” (5:13) as Christ served them. Significantly, love heads the list of the Spirit's fruit (5:22). (TLSB)

And it's so important for us to recognize that in the Supper, in our life in Christ, that's what we do. And when we do this, this would have just absolutely shocked the Galatians and his opponents, we bring to fulfillment -- and again, the Greek here says it this way: Bring to fulfillment over and over and over again the law of Christ. Now, what is that law? The law is brought to fulfillment in one word: Love your neighbor as yourself. The law of Christ is now the law fulfilled in love. In Christ on the cross. Serving one another in love. Bearing each other's burdens. Restoring in the spirit of gentleness those who are broken. That which Christ wills and graciously bestows is what is given in the law of love. Through us. As we are manifesting Christ in the world bearing each other's burdens. You can see that there are burdens to bear. There are sins to forgive. There are gross outbursts of sin that need to be

publicly restored back into the congregation. This is what it means to be a community that is marked by the Spirit. (Just – V-40)

### **Test Your Own Works; Bear Your Own Load (6:3–5) (CC)**

**6:3–5** *For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting with respect to himself alone, and not with respect to another. For each one shall bear his own load.* Gal 6:3 further develops 6:1–2 (thus the initial “for,” γάρ). In helping a brother or sister who is overtaken in transgression (6:1), pride is a very real danger. Perhaps some viewed themselves as “above” mutual burden-bearing (6:2). Such pride or vanity (cf. 5:26) is nothing more than self-deception. “He is nothing”; all that he or she has is the gift of the Spirit! As Hansen commented:

Our capacity for self-deception is frightening. It is amazing how blind otherwise brilliant people can be to their own spiritual direction in life. In fact, the more brilliant people are, the more skilled they are at developing rationalizations to deceive themselves and to hide from God. The story of Adam and Eve’s hiding from God behind their skimpy clothes and even skimpier excuses is our common human experience. Paul’s warning needs to be heard, and to be heard often, to warn us against our most brilliant self-delusions. (CC)

Overestimations of the “self” fostered divisions at Galatia that, consequently, prevented fulfillment of “the Law of Christ” (6:2). Paul’s rivals have divided the Galatians into the Law observant, who were of supposedly right status, and the non-Law observant, who were deemed lacking in their faith. The pillars at Jerusalem to whom the rivals appealed were considered “to be something” in 2:2, 6, 9. Now the apostle speaks of those in the Galatians’ midst who think they are “something.”<sup>89</sup> Paul wants to obliterate arrogant, humanly contrived hierarchies in favor of mutual servanthood. Many Christian preachers these days speak of “servant leadership,” a phrase worthy of serious consideration. Perhaps the phrase should be a “servant attitude” or a “servant lifestyle.” (CC)

The Greco-Roman world was a society of limited goods. Because of the lack of wealth, people distinguished themselves in other ways. They accrued honor, and the loss of that currency was shameful. Honor in antiquity could accrue from one’s wealth, education, social status, or employment. Who would want to take on the burden-bearing of a slave if it could be avoided? For those of higher status, burden-bearing could be shameful. Ben Witherington observed: “How counter-intuitive it was to suggest that some one of higher status should actually step down and become a servant of those less well off and more burdened.” (CC)

This world has its honor conventions as well. Even in Christian churches there are social hierarchies with their varying honor ratings: bishops, archbishops, and popes; district officials and synodical officials. Pastors sometimes accrue honor at the expense of their people. Church bodies are full of people who “think they are something.” Paul will have none of it. Christians are *slaves* of Christ. We serve a common Master and are nothing of ourselves, whether granted the privilege of honor or authority in Christ’s church or not. All that the believer has is a gift from the Lord (see 1 Cor 3:18–23; 4:7). Such gifts were never intended to be glorified at the expense of others. In a status-conscious, self-centered society, church bodies and church leaders must nurture a countercultural humility and comport themselves as slaves for the sake of others, even as God’s people hold their leaders in high regard. The church must remain Christ-oriented to the glory of God rather than self-oriented. (CC)

People in the Greco-Roman world regularly praised themselves, as the rhetoricians and philosophers of the day attest. “Boasting” did not necessarily bear negative connotations for the Greek speaker. The only limits on self-praise were that one must be honest in one’s claims and without arrogance (Cicero, *Inv.* 1.16.22). Plutarch wrote an entire work titled *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*. In what should the

Christian boast? Paul writes of a boast in 6:4 that is “with respect to” (εἰς) one’s own work alone (εἰς ἑαυτὸν μόνον) and not “with respect to” (εἰς) someone else’s (εἰς τὸν ἕτερον). The reflexive pronoun “his own/himself” (ἑαυτοῦ), used twice in 6:4, corresponds to the same reflexive pronoun used in 6:3. The use of the reflexive pronoun in both verses is emphatic (note μόνον, “alone,” in 6:4). The ancients considered self-evaluation the perfect antidote for self-deception (thus Paul’s mildly adversative connective δέ, “but,” at the beginning of 6:4). The verb translated as “examine” (δοκιμάζω) means “test” or “approve” (1 Cor 3:13; 11:28; 2 Cor 13:5; 1 Thess 5:21; 1 Tim 3:10), as here, but elsewhere the word can also mean “accept as proven or approve” (Rom 2:18; 14:22; 2 Cor 8:22; 1 Thess 2:4) or “think best, choose” (1 Cor 16:3). The present tense here implies an ongoing process. Self-examination is therefore a good habit! Paul does not have in mind some sort of subjective introspection, but rather a review of one’s actual deeds (*in toto*). “Work” (ἔργον), placed early in the Greek sentence for emphasis, is a collective noun (see Heb 6:10; Rev 22:12), referring to “the basic character of a person’s existence.” “Work” in the singular may be intended to contrast with the “works” (plural) “of the Law” in Gal 2:16. Paul writes elsewhere that all people’s works, including those of Christians, will be tested (e.g., 1 Cor 3:10–15). This end-times testing begins already in the present. Each Galatian must test his or her own work, “and *then*” (καὶ τότε, Gal 6:4) he or she will have a worthwhile boast (see the very similar comments in 2 Cor 13:5 about self-examination and testing). Paul regularly speaks of illegitimate and *legitimate* “boasting” (καύχημα and cognates; see Rom 4:2; 15:17; 1 Cor 1:26–31 [in oneself or in the Lord]; 5:6; 9:15, 16; 2 Cor 1:12–14; 5:12; 9:3; Phil 1:26; 2:16). The Greek article in Gal 6:4 (τὸ καύχημα, *his or her* “reason for boasting”) restricts the word to an individual’s own boast. (CC)

The prepositional phrases in the latter half of 6:4 (εἰς ἑαυτόν; οὐκ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον) are capable of differing interpretations. In a first approach, the *basis* for boasting is to be “in oneself” (εἰς ἑαυτόν) and “not in (comparison with) another” (οὐκ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον). As for what it might mean to boast “in another,” Paul describes just such boasting in 6:12–13: the rivals hope to boast in the Galatians’ circumcision! Certainly Paul himself boasts in others in 2 Cor 1:14 and 2 Cor 9:3. In the heated atmosphere of the Galatian controversy, however, the Galatians as well as the rivals would do well to test their *own* work rather than worry about the work of others. A valid boast in one’s own work is ultimately grounded in what God has done in Christ on the cross (6:14)! Such work mirrors the Law as taken hold of by Christ (6:2). Nevertheless, the preposition Paul employs (εἰς) should be translated as “with respect to/in reference to” and not “in comparison with” (cf. 2 Cor 10:13, 15, 16). Also, the two prepositional phrases in 6:4 (εἰς ἑαυτόν; οὐκ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον) likely should be translated the same way. One may boast “in comparison with” someone else, but how does one boast “in comparison with” oneself? Had Paul meant a boast “in” one *basis* or ground and not “in” another, he would have used another preposition, either ἐν, ἐπί, or ὑπέρ (e.g., 2 Cor 8:24). This first approach therefore has its problems. (CC)

A second approach is to convey an emphasis in the translation that the boast is *directed toward* oneself and not toward someone else. In this approach, the ground or basis for the boast is not at issue. Rather, the self-controlled believer (5:23) does not flaunt the good work. The preposition εἰς can indeed mean a boast directed “toward” someone; 2 Cor 8:24 uses the preposition εἰς for boasting “toward,” and that boast toward (εἰς) is a boast based on (ὑπέρ) a viable ground. A problem with this second approach is that it remains difficult to understand what it would mean to direct a boast “toward oneself.” (CC)

The supporting statement in 6:5 (note the γάρ) about bearing one’s *own* load implies one’s own load *in contrast to* another’s. If εἰς simply means “with respect to/in reference to,” as seems preferable in this context, the individual boasts with respect to his or her own work or load and not with respect to another’s. The works of the Christian proceed from the life-changing power of Christ! Paul grants that the believer, by Christ’s power, will produce a genuine work. Faith *works* through love (5:6), the love the Spirit creates (5:22). Once the priority of Christ’s saving and empowering action is restored, a genuine work and a legitimate boast will follow. With proper self-assessment, the Galatians will no longer condemn those caught in transgression but rather will seek to restore the brother or sister in the gentleness

Christ's Spirit inspires. Let that be their boast—a different kind of boast from what the world is accustomed! (CC)

The supporting statement in 6:5 that each person should bear his own load as an individual seems to contradict Paul's emphasis in 6:3 on *mutual* burden-bearing. The contradiction is more apparent than real. Mutual assistance does not eliminate the ultimate individual responsibility for one's own load. Since each person must ultimately bear his or her own load (6:5), personal examination is necessary (6:4). Paul's word for "load" in 6:5 (φορτίον) is not the same as "burden" (βάρος) in 6:2. The terms may well be synonymous. Perhaps certain loads are for the individual alone, whereas other burdens require help, but the apostle does not render such a distinction in loads or burdens explicit.<sup>107</sup> The individual load of 6:5 and the mutual burden-bearing of 6:3 are best taken as another instance of the interplay in 6:1–10 between corporate and individual motifs. Again, while believers in Christ assist one another, each individual is ultimately responsible for his or her load. Gal 6:2 and 6:5 are therefore complementary. (CC)

The future tense of "shall bear" (βαστάσει) in 6:5 suggests to some an eschatological referent. Scholars have debated whether Paul is referring in this verse to the final judgment. The future tense may simply be gnomic as is common in aphorisms.<sup>110</sup> The future tense may even be imperatival. Nothing in 6:1–5 requires a reference to end-times judgment. The mutual burden-bearing of 6:2 is in the present. The boast of 6:4 is in the present. The tense of the verb "bear" in 6:5 does not adequately convey in itself a sense of futurity. For example, the same verb with the same tense in 5:10 (the future of βαστάζω) is qualified by the words "the judgment" (τὸ κρίμα), which renders unmistakably clear the eschatological reference of "will bear the judgment." Such contextual cues are absent in 6:5. The day-to-day financial assistance of 6:6, along with the connection between 6:5 and 6:6, serves as a further argument against the eschatological interpretation of 6:5. On the other hand, an eschatological context is clear in 6:7–10. When Paul speaks of "examining" or "testing" one's own works in 1 Cor 11:28, he employs the same verb (δοκιμάζω) as in Gal 6:4, and, in that context, such examination has eschatological implications. Paul regularly speaks of the eschatological judging of people's "works" (Rom 2:6; 1 Cor 3:5–4:5). Since Paul employs the language of judgment elsewhere in eschatological contexts, and since a clear eschatological context *frames* 6:1–5, the possibility cannot be dismissed that 6:5 refers to the end-times judgment. (CC)

**6:3** *he deceives himself* – And then Paul goes onto explain this in the next three verses. And you can see here that he's always responding to the context in which he is with his opponents. He says: For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Now, he of course here is speaking about his opponents and their perfectionism. Their hierarchal arrangements in which they are setting up the law as to who can achieve these things. He said: This is not what it's about. This is not what this whole coming of Christ and his Spirit is about. (Just – V-6)

Our opinion of ourselves shapes our conduct toward others (cf Lk 18:9, 11; 2 Co 10:12). Those thinking they have fewer faults than others, will soon tend not to sympathize with other's shortcomings. (TLSB)

**6:4** ἕκαστος ("each one")—This reading has strong external attestation but is omitted by ℣<sup>46</sup> B syr<sup>pesh</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup>. Scribes may have overlooked this ἕκαστος because of the parallel use of the same word at the start of 6:5. (CC)

*Each one test his own work.* The emphasis here is on personal responsibility (see 1Co 11:28; 2Co 13:5). (CSB)

John Chrysostom: "This he says ... in the way of concession.... He that is wont to boast with reference to himself only, and not against others, will soon reform this failing [of self boasting] also" (NPNF 1 13:44). (TLSB)

And then in Verse 4 -- and here we have to translate this carefully. The word here is work. And like the ESV says: But let each one test his own work. Now, what this is the Gospel work. And that Gospel work is bearing each other's burdens and thus, fulfill the law of Christ. Each one, each individual is going to be examined according to his own Gospel work. And then it says: And then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. You can't boast -- we've always said this: You can't boast in your neighbor's faith or his love or his acts of mercy and compassion and his forgiveness. It has to be you yourself. (Just – V-40)

Now, here you see that Paul understands the big picture. He's always talking about community. But at the end of the day, our salvation is based on our own confession of faith, our own manifestation of Christ in the world, our own Gospel work. Our own bearing the burdens of others. Each one of us has to do that individually. And we don't boast in someone else's. We boast in our own. And in boasting in our own as we're going to see at the end of the epistle, we're not boasting in our own, we're boasting in what Christ is doing through us. It's not our work. It's the work of Christ. Like Paul says: I'm not going to boast in anything but the cross of Jesus Christ and his sufferings. (Just – V-40)

**6:5** *carry his own load*. The “for” at the beginning of the verse connects it with v. 4. Each of us is responsible before God. The reference may be to the future judgment (the verb is in the future tense), when every person will give an account to God (Ro 14:12; 2Co 5:10). (CSB)

Not contradictory to v 2, but complementary. Different Gk terms are used. Those who accept personal accountability for their own actions before God (bearing their own “load,” Gk *phortion*) are more willing to bear others’ burdens (v 2, “burden,” Gk *baros*). (TLSB)

And then finally in Verse 5 -- and this brings us to the end of this section -- for each one will have to bear his own load. You bear each other's burdens but at the judgment of God when you stand before God, you must bear your own load. Namely, you must testify there to your faith in Christ and the concrete expressions of that faith as you have lived Christ out in the world by bearing each other's burdens. And thus bringing to fulfillment over and over again the law of Christ. (Just – V-40)

**6:6** ὁ κατηχούμενος τὸν λόγον (“the one who is taught the Word”)—The noun τὸν λόγον is an accusative with a passive participle (κατηχούμενος) retained from the double accusative construction in the active form: “he taught him the Word” (κατήχησεν αὐτὸν τὸν λόγον) becomes “the one being taught the Word”; BDF §§ 155, 159 (1). (CC)

*Let the one who is taught the Word share in all good things with the teacher.* Gal 6:6 offers the earliest NT clue that there may have been a teaching or pastoral office of some sort.<sup>114</sup> The singular articular participle translated literally as “the one teaching” (ὁ κατηχῶν) refers to a class of people (cf. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Formal teaching was therefore taking place at Galatia. The congregational teacher is called, literally, a “catechist” (κατηχῶν, *catēchōn*; cf. κατηχέω, *catēcheō*, “catechize,” in Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19). “Teacher” is a more natural, less anachronistic translation. Such teaching, if not a full-time occupation, was sufficiently time-consuming to require financial support. The mere use of the Greek word κατηχῶν (6:6) in the Galatian context provides no evidence for a period of *pre-baptismal* instruction as would be common in later centuries. Acts 8:36; 16:15, 33 suggest that Baptism took place without much delay. The first Christians were simply engaged in studying the significance of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures (Lk 1:4; Acts 17:11; 18:25; 1 Cor 14:36; Col 3:16). Teachers therefore became an identifiable group (Acts 13:1; Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). In Acts 14:23 Paul appointed elders in the churches of south Galatia. Paul may be emphasizing those whose duty it is to teach because of the false teachings (and false teachers) present at Galatia. (CC)

Paul offers in Gal 6:6 an exception (δέ, untranslated) to the rule regarding individual responsibility in 6:5. The one instance where a Christian has a *right* to expect help from others is when one is called to serve as a teacher of the faith (cf. Lk 10:7; 1 Cor 9:3–14; 2 Cor 11:7–11). The ancients often expressed the sentiment that teachers should be supported by their followers. In the Hippocratic oath or “covenant”: “To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine” (ἡγήσασθαι τε τὸν διδάξαντά με τὴν τέχνην ταύτην ἴσα γενέτησιν ἑμοῖσιν καὶ βίου κοινώσασθαι καὶ χρεῶν χρηρίζοντι μετάδοσιν ποιήσασθαι). The “good things” (Gal 6:6) to be shared with the teacher included not just financial support but also material support such as food (Lk 1:53; 12:18–19; cf. “good things” as what is necessary for life in Deut 28:11; Sirach 22:23). Sharing “in all *good* things” (ἐν πᾶσιν ἀγαθοῖς, Gal 6:6) is an expression of the Spirit’s fruit of “goodness” (ἀγαθωσύνη, 5:22). (CC)

Paul states the principle of support for teachers of the Word with no qualification or further comment. He assumes the principle as non-controversial. If only the practice were as clear-cut as the principle. The necessity to support teachers of the Word is regularly ignored. These days many pastors in small congregations struggle to survive as they and their families experience genuine poverty. Such situations are utterly shameful! Whatever one may think of the minister as an individual, Christians are required by Scripture to look after those who teach the Word. Daily ministry expenses should be reimbursed. Salaries should always be adjusted for the cost of living and should be sufficient for the teachers’ needs, whether as individuals or as heads of households. (CC)

*share all good things.* See Php 4:14–19. (CSB)

And so this admonition of Paul, not only to the Galatians but particularly in light of the opponents, is a very significant one. Again, we have to read between the lines here. But what it seems to be that is happening in this congregation is this: That the catechetical instructors that Paul left behind are not being supported by the teachers who are his opponents. So you’ve got two teachers going on. Paul’s teachers. And now these opponents who are teaching. And they are cutting out these catechetical instructors by not supporting them financially. And it appears as if some of the Galatians are going along with that. Now, this is pretty typical. I think every one of you can identify with you know you want to get rid of someone in a parish, you start cutting their salary. This is going to make it impossible for them to live and continue to serve in that congregation. (Just – V-41)

That’s exactly what’s happening here. So this is what Paul says in Verse 6. One who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who teaches. This is simply what Jesus said when a laborer is worthy of his hire. That you’ve got to support those who preach and teach the truth of the Gospel in your congregations. Now, this is something that indicates that in the teaching of the truth of the Gospel, what’s at stake is the truth of the Gospel. (Just – V-41)

### **How One Sows Will Be How One Reaps (6:7–8)**

**6:7–8** *Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows, that he or she will also reap, because the one who sows to his or her own flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; the one who sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap life eternal.* The lack of a transitional particle at the beginning of 6:7 does not thereby sever 6:7–8 from 6:6. Such abruptness serves to regain attention prior to an important point. Paul is bringing his warnings and admonitions from 5:13 to a powerful climax. “Do not be deceived” (i.e., “do not deceive yourselves”) signals the severity of the admonition (1 Cor 6:9; 15:33; also James 1:16; cf. Lk 21:8). “God is not mocked.” “Mock” (μυκτηρίζω) is a NT hapax legomenon, but the verb, along with its cognates, is common throughout the Septuagint (e.g., 2 Chr 36:16). The greatest concentration is in Wisdom literature and the psalms (Job 22:19; Pss 44:13 [MT 44:14; LXX 43:14]; 80:6 [MT 80:7; LXX 79:7]; Prov 11:12; 12:8; 15:5, 20; 23:9; for mocking God, see Prov 1:30 and Ezek 8:17).

The word was used for treating with contempt, mocking, or turning up one's "nose" (μυκτῆρ). Such behavior shames another as unworthy of respect and beneath one's dignity in a society that values honor. God will not stand for it. God will *not* be mocked by human beings or by their choice of lifestyle. The scales of justice will be set right. People will reap what they sow. Paul quotes a common proverbial saying from Greek and Jewish literature applicable to anyone (a/any "person," ἄνθρωπος). God will *not* be mocked (μυκτηρίζω) since an individual will reap what he or she sows. God guarantees justice in the cosmos: people's deeds will have their rightful consequences—even if only at the end of the age. (CC)

Paul shifts imagery in 6:8 from seed that is sown ("whatever a person sows," ὃ ... ἐὰν σπείρῃ, 6:7) to the soil *into* which the seed is sown ("the one who sows to his own flesh," ὁ σπείρων εἰς τὴν σάρκα, 6:8). This shift permits Paul to apply the agricultural imagery to the flesh-Spirit antithesis he had laid out earlier in the letter, especially in chapter 5 (3:3; 4:29; 5:13, 15–25). With respect to sowing into the flesh, Paul is not talking about sexual lusts or a sinful nature. He is talking about a *power* that holds sway over an otherwise helpless humanity. The believer, however, has a choice. Sowing to one's flesh stands in contrast to sowing to the Spirit (the Holy Spirit; note Paul's avoidance of the word ἑαυτοῦ, "the spirit of himself" or "his own spirit"). If one sows "(in) to" (εἰς) the flesh, one will reap "*from*" (ἐκ) the flesh a worthless, corrupted, perishing fruit ("destruction," φθοράν). The flesh stands on the wrong side of the apocalyptic divide between this world and the next (5:13, 16–21, 24; but also 2:16; 3:3; 4:23, 29; 6:12–13; Rom 8:12–13; 1 Cor 15:42–50). The flesh has no future. Paul is probably including a reference to circumcision in the flesh (see Gal 6:13). Circumcision is impotent against the flesh, despite what the Galatians may have heard from the rival teachers! "Sowing to the flesh" (6:8), of course, includes more than just circumcision. Sowing to the flesh includes also selfish ambition, rage, discord, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and immorality. To sow to the flesh is, ironically, to forfeit the good harvest. If, on the other hand, the believer invests time sowing to the Spirit, the reward is eternal. Christian behavior has eternal consequences. (CC)

Christians are enabled by the Spirit to make serious choices. What began in the Spirit must continue in the Spirit (3:3)! The Christian life always involves, on the one hand, divine empowerment and guidance (5:16, 18, 25) along with, on the other hand, the responsibility to act on the imperative. God's gracious empowerment and the believer's own activity work hand-in-glove in the daily Christian walk, a walk that takes some effort. Faith must "work" in love (5:6; 6:4). In the words of Phil 2:12–13: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the one working in you [enabling you] both to will and to work for [his] good pleasure." An unfortunate, occasional side effect of the Reformation polemic against "works" is a tendency toward complacent inaction. "Heaven forbid, pietism!" or so goes the unfortunate (misapplied) slogan. Paul does not end the letter without vigorously admonishing his hearers. (CC)

The modern pastor must admonish his people with the apostle Paul. A pastor must boldly and lovingly point out the genuine, eternal consequences of people's decisions and actions. How little does the ever-imminent end-times horizon function in modern Christian preaching! Choose rightly! Such admonitions will never stray into the realm of "works righteous" semi-Pelagianism as long as the admonitions are constantly and carefully grounded in the indicative statements of Christ's saving death along with his empowering, motivating Spirit. As Luther said: "If there is anything in us, it is not our own; it is a gift of God" (AE 27:393). Far too many popular, best-selling Christian books these days exhort people to a proper lifestyle or behavior without any anchoring in the indicative of Christ's completed work on humanity's behalf. If the cross of Christ and the Spirit's empowerment ("fruit"!) do not remain ever central to Christian exhortation, such exhortation *ceases to be Christian*! Many Christians these days are being deceived by a false teaching rather analogous to what the Galatians faced! (CC)

**6:7** μὴ πλανᾶσθε ("do not be deceived")—Marcion omitted the negative (μὴ) and read πλανᾶσθε as a present indicative: "you *are* deceived." That reading is reflected also in Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 5.4 (PL 2:479C; cf. ANF 3:438, including n. 2). The majority of the textual tradition, however, has the negated



present imperative μή πλανᾶσθε, “do not be deceived.” Paul employs this same exhortation prior to serious warnings in 1 Cor 6:9; 15:33; so also James 1:16; cf. Lk 21:8; 2 Macc 7:18. (CC)

*God is not mocked* – Paul addresses a horrible threat here to fine fellows of this kind, who do this sort of thing and yet want to give the impression that they are not poking fun but are true evangelicals who worship God religiously. “Do not be deceived,” he says, “God is not mocked.” It is as though he were saying: “Surely you have not deceived God, but only yourselves. You will not mock God, but God will mock you” (Ps. 2:4). There is a well-known little verse that says: “You have not deceived me, your teacher, but yourself.” (Luther)

Humans cannot turn up their noses at God and expect to get by with it. The immutable law built into creation, illustrated by sowing and reaping, is that actions have consequences (cf Pr 22:8). (TLSB)

*one sows...will also reap.* See 2Co 9:6. As vv. 8–9 show, the principle applies not only negatively but also positively. (CSB)

And Paul, you know, you kind of go: Whoa, Paul, this is really sharp language. Do not be deceived, he says. God is not mocked. Now, he's talking about support of his teachers financially. God is not mocked. So don't be deceived by this. For everyone who sows, that will he also reap. Now, this is a common expression, it's used all over the place. It's used in Jesus' teaching. But here it's used by Paul and it's very clear that he's talking about support for the catechetical teachers. Financial support. So that the truth of the Gospel might be heard. If they go, so goes the truth of the Gospel. And he says the way in which you sow, you're going to reap. If you don't sow by supporting them, you are not going to reap what is the fruit of the Spirit that comes from the truth of the Gospel of preaching Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead. (Just – V-41)

**6:8** εἰς τὴν σάρκα ... εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα (“to the flesh ... to the Spirit”)—One sows “into” (εἰς) the flesh or the Spirit as figurative soil types. At the same time, such a sowing is “for” or “unto” the flesh or the Spirit. The translation “to” may better convey both nuances. (CC)

*sows to his flesh* – He keeps the sowing and reaping imagery here, as well. He says. For the one who sows to his own flesh. And here this is circumcision. To his own flesh is circumcision. He will reap -- and look at what is -- the Greek it's the last word of the sentence. He will reap corruption from his flesh. Now, let me read you a translation. The one who sows to his own flesh will reap from the flesh corruption. Now, that is a strong statement. He's talking there about his opponents. They sow circumcision. They are going to reap from that flesh, from that circumcision, that teaching of circumcision, they are going to reap corruption. Corruption. That's a strong word. (Just – V-41)

But then the one who reaps by the Spirit, not his own spirit, but the Spirit of Christ, will reap out of that Spirit of Christ eternal life. Now, look at corruption versus eternal life. Think of the teachings of Jesus. You know, laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven. As opposed to those treasures in which moths can destroy and rust can destroy. Eternal life is what you will reap if you sow from the Spirit by supporting these catechetical teachers who bring the truth of the Gospel, what you will receive is eternal life. Now, this is the first time we've seen that expression, eternal life. Life that never if ends. And this is truly living in liberty now and forever. (Just – V-41)

Now, that is a profound statement. And he's talking here about the fruit of the Spirit which is generosity. He's talking about giving to the church. He's talking about how an expression of love and mercy and compassion is shown in a very, very tangible way by what we give. Now, I wish I had time to go into the teaching of Jesus, as you perhaps know, I've written a commentary on Luke's Gospel. I was so surprised in writing that commentary how much Jesus talks about money. And how money is very important as an

expression of what it is that -- you know who it is, I should say, that we are and what it is that we do. (Just – V-41)

*corruption.* The sinful nature's work. Cf 5:19–21. (TLSB)

Now Paul adds a metaphor and an allegory. He applies the general statement about sowing to the particular case of providing for ministers, saying: “He who sows to the Spirit, that is, he who provides for preachers of the Word, performs a spiritual work and will reap eternal life.” Now the question is whether we merit eternal life by good works, for that is what Paul seems to be asserting in this passage. Earlier (ch. 3) we discussed at sufficient length the passages that speak about works and rewards. It is extremely necessary, following Paul's example, to exhort believers to do good works, that is, to exercise their faith through good works; for unless these works follow faith, this is the surest possible sign that the faith is not genuine. (Luther)

*sows to the Spirit.* Living under the Holy Spirit's power and direction (5:5, 18, 25). (TLSB)

*eternal life.* In 5:21 Paul speaks of inheriting “the kingdom of God,” here of reaping “eternal life.” The first focuses on the realm (sphere, context) that will be inherited (as Israel inherited the promised land); the second focuses on the blessed life that will be enjoyed in that realm. (CSB)

Cf Rm 8:13. (TLSB)

### **Do Good to All (6:9–10)**

**6:9–10** *But let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap [a harvest] if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to the members of the household of faith.* Paul closes 6:1–10 with two concluding exhortations: (1) to *do what is “good”* (τὸ καλόν, 6:9) and (2) to *work for “the good”* (τὸ ἀγαθόν) of all (6:10). These similar admonitions are linked by the key word *καιρός* in both verses (but translated differently): “at the *proper time*” (καιρῷ, 6:9) and “as we have *opportunity*” (καιρόν, 6:10). At the same time, 6:9–10 is linked to the preceding verse by the repetition of the verb “to reap” in the future tense: “the one ... will reap” (θερίσει, 6:8) and “we will reap” (θερίσομεν, 6:9). The Spirit, as people sow to him, will bear fruit within the Christian community (5:22–23), and that fruit will be reaped. The harvest that will be fully realized at the end of time is *even now* being realized among believers to a certain extent as they patiently serve one another in Christ's love. One sows to the Spirit in actions directed toward the benefit of others. The reaping will always be “in due season,” at the proper time of harvest. The “but” (δέ, 6:9) signals a qualification of the previous verse (6:8): what Christians sow they may not witness being reaped in the present hour. So Christians must persevere. They must not “become weary” (ἐγκακῶμεν; similarly 2 Thess 3:13: “Do not grow weary of doing good”). The Galatians must endeavor to remain steadfast in sowing to the Spirit. (CC)

Paul strikes a somber note in the condition he expresses on reaping: “if we do not give up” (μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι). Individuals may experience fatigue in their labors for the kingdom. Christians may become discouraged when they find themselves struggling against many of the same problems over and over again. They may grow weary. Reaping fruit is not automatic. A real danger exists that believers in Christ may apostatize, falling away from faith, and miss out on eternal life. The cosmic power of the flesh remains steadfast in its assaults. For some Christians the doctrinal slogan is “once saved, always saved.” Paul would not agree. The admonition to stand firm is quite sincere. Human beings can always choose to sever themselves from Christ and God's grace (5:4). God always *calls* in grace (1:6, 15), but that call can be resisted. Once Christians have been granted the power of Christ's Spirit at conversion, they are responsible agents and have a responsibility to use that power to resist the yoke of slavery (5:1). God saves by his unmerited grace, but human beings can always forfeit what they have in Christ and surrender

to the flesh (5:24). The warning to the Galatian Christians, indeed to *all* Christians, could not be clearer. Believers must not grow weary in doing good since they will reap what they sow with eternal consequences. A believer should be *active* in self-sacrifice by virtue of the Spirit's power and recognize his or her own personal accountability. Each person should examine his or her work (6:4). Is he or she manifesting a faith expressing itself in love (5:6)? To sow to the Spirit is to avoid sowing to the flesh. (CC)

Paul condemns the “works” of the flesh in 5:19–21 and the “works” of the Law in 3:10. The Galatians would not have missed how they are now responsible to “*work/do good*” (ἐργάζομαι), a cognate verb of “works” (ἔργα, 3:10; 5:19; see also the singular ἔργον in 6:4)! Christians are not saved *by* good works, but they certainly will not be saved without them. Each person will be judged according to his or her own deeds. Paul emphasizes that repeatedly throughout his writings (e.g., Rom 2:6–11; 1 Cor 3:13–15). A believer's life gives witness to an identity in Christ and the Spirit. The Spirit manifests itself in a person's works as he or she labors for Christ and for the sake of others. Believers will give evidence of the Spirit's presence in how they live and in what they do. Although laboring in Christ can be to the point of fatigue in this life, God's Spirit will provide the ability to persevere. The Christian is already justified by faith and adopted securely into the family of God (3:26–29; 4:4–5). A new creation has already begun (6:15)! The Spirit will provide the weary Christian the needed energy to continue on! Paul refuses to provide a new Law of Moses, but he nevertheless recognizes the need for prodding and exhorting to good works. (CC)

With 6:10 Paul comes to the conclusion and key point of his admonitions (“therefore,” ἄρα οὖν). Gal 6:10 expresses the sentiment of 6:9 more positively: as time allows, Christians must labor for the good of all. The adverbial temporal particle ὡς with the accusative noun καιρόν can be translated eschatologically as “as long as (we have opportunity)” or existentially as “whenever.” The translation “as” reflects the ambiguity, but the immediate context is eschatological and favors “as long as.”<sup>136</sup> Since the time is short, seize every opportunity that presents itself! Christians are to be an industrious lot! If the path seems difficult or long, the believer must take it one step at a time while relying on the Spirit's help and guidance. As Gordon Fee put it, believers will not find “perfection” in this life; they will experience the “infection” of Christ's dwelling in his people. (CC)

The good works of Christians are directed toward all people, but especially toward those “of the household of faith” (6:10). Clearly Paul is referring to a subset within humanity toward whom the Galatians will especially exhibit good deeds. Some have supposed that the phrase “household of faith” (6:10; cf. Eph 2:19's “household of God”) may be a Christianized version of the OT “house of Israel” (οἶκος [τοῦ] Ἰσραὴλ). The problem is that Paul's wording does not correspond to the Septuagint's phrasing of “house of Israel.”<sup>140</sup> Some have therefore concluded that Paul is referring by “household” to the Jerusalem saints, but elsewhere Paul refers to gentile Christian assemblies as a “household.” The first Christians, after all, met in homes (Rom 16:5, 23; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:15, 19; Philemon 2). “The household of faith” need not imply any particular focus on the Galatian house gatherings (cf. Eph 2:19); Paul likely employs the language as yet another term in the broader constellation of familial imagery throughout this letter (e.g., “sons of God,” 3:26; “brothers [and sisters],” e.g., 6:1). (CC)

The “household of faith” language is significant in another way as well. What binds Christians together is not an ethnic or social identity (see Gal 3:28) but rather a common faith in Christ as Deliverer (1:4). Racism and social exclusivism have no place among God's people. If God's grace is no longer limited to a single people, then why should the good works of Christians be limited to the household of God?<sup>144</sup> Such charitable deeds and financial beneficence toward all should never be slandered with slogans of being mere “social Gospel.” Too often people fall into a comfortable, easy “either-or” pattern of thought—as if one could be charitable to fellow Christians at the expense of the rest of the world. Paul and his

God will have none of that. Faith always manifests itself in love, whether among Christian family members or not—but especially within the household of faith. (CC)

Is not this the “fast” I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see a naked person, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your family member? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, ... the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. (Is 58:6–8) (CC)

**6:9** μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν (“let us not become weary”)—The text is well supported externally. The alternate reading in C and the Byzantine text, μὴ ἐκκακῶμεν, “let us not lose heart,” reflects a scribal change to a more common word (cf. 2 Cor 4:1, 16; Eph 3:13; 2 Thess 3:13). ἐγκακέω does not appear in Classical Greek literature, the Septuagint, or in any other Jewish writing in Greek prior to the NT period. The word may have been coined in the second century BC (cf. Polybius 4.19.10 [ἐνεκάκησαν]; BGU 1043.3). (CC)

Christians must not become discouraged when they do not see immediate or observable results from their well-doing (a lesson learned from farmers who must wait patiently). Cf Lk 18:1; 2Co 4:1; Eph 3:13. (TLSB)

*not grow weary of doing good* – Now, he's not done. Verse 9 he says -- and now he's going to talk in more general ways. But I think still the fruit of the Spirit, generosity, is what is in mind here. Let us not grow weary in doing good. Doing good. Namely, fruits of the Spirit. For in due season, we will reap if we do not give up. Now, you can see that it's a future. We will reap. It's something that will happen in the future. And going back to the previous verse, it's eternal life. But eternal life is already with us now. And Paul knows that. It's that now not yet tension. But what he can see -- and this is true of all of us. This is perhaps some of the things that is most evident of the virus of sin that infects us. Sometimes in this world we get weary. We get weary of living out the christological life. Because we get persecuted for it. Or we don't see people responding as they should. And it is something that can just simply wear us down. I think that's what's happening in the Galatian congregation. They know what Paul said. But these opponents are so much beating on them, the world is beating on them, that they are tired. They are weary. They are warriors on the front lines of that Apocalyptic war. And they are worn out. (Just – V-41)

**6:10** ἔχομεν (“we have”)—This reading is well supported externally by  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  A B<sup>2</sup> C D F G  $\Psi$  Byzantine it vg Marcion Clement. The present subjunctive ἔχωμεν, “we might have,” has good external support as well ( $\times$  B\* 33). Although the meaning is the same, the subjunctive is probably the result of itacism, the accidental substitution of a similar-sounding vowel or diphthong ( $\omega$  for  $o$ ).

ἐργαζόμεθα (“let us do”)—This present subjunctive is better attested ( $\times$  B\* C D F G  $\Psi$ ) than the present indicative ἐργαζόμεθα, “we do” (A B<sup>2</sup> P).  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  has the first aorist subjunctive ἐργασώμεθα. Burton and Longenecker concluded that, along with the better external attestation, intrinsic probability favors the present subjunctive.

τὸ ἀγαθόν (“good”)—The article τό is generic; the neuter singular substantive is the equivalent of an abstract noun. (CC)

Inspired by God’s generosity. John Chrysostom: “The rule of life which Grace gives invited both land and sea to the [table] of charity, only it shows greater care for its own household” (NPNF 1 13:45). “Help them and promote their interest—in every way and wherever you can—purely out of love for God and to please Him. Do this in the confidence that He will abundantly reward you for everything” (LC I 328). (TLSB)

*especially to those who are of the household of faith.* And so here is Paul, the pastor, encouraging them. He says very clearly: Let us not grow weary in doing good. For in due season, in the \*\*\*chiros that's the word, in the critical time of salvation, we will reap if we don't give up. And now Verse 10 just continues that. So therefore then as that critical time comes, as we have opportunity. In this critical time of salvation. And this is wonderful here what he says. Let us continue over and over again to do good to everyone. To live out the fruits of the Spirit to everyone. And he says especially to those who are of the household of faith. It begins at home. It begins in the church. It doesn't end there. Because this life of love is lived out among the whole world. But it begins in the church. And I think here perhaps Paul is speaking of the Jerusalem church. The fact that they are broken by a famine. They need Paul to take up the collection for them. That there is real tangible expressions of need there. And let's not grow weary in taking up that collection for them, as well. (Just – V-41)

But I think Paul here is showing very clearly that one of the ways in which the impulsive desire of the flesh and living under the law can wear down a church is that they cease to see that the Gospel is expressed in concrete expressions of mercy. And that's not only just simply kind of in spiritual expressions by loving one another and forgiving one another. But concrete expressions. Where you actually bring tangible evidence of helping people in their lives. (Just – V-41)

**6:1–10** Members of God's family restore the erring, bear one another's burdens, support their teachers, and do good to all—especially to fellow Christians. An attitude of moral superiority closes the heart against the brother or sister in need (cf 1 Jn 3:17). The Son of God “loved me and gave Himself for me” (2:20), that I may be free to serve Him and my neighbor in need. • Teach me to be patient with others, Lord, so I may not grow tired of doing good. Restore me with unfailing mercy. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Final Warning and Benediction*

**11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which[b] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on 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.**

**6:11-18** When we get to the last seven verses of Galatians, Chapter 6 Verses 11 to 18, we are in what is the equivalent in say a rhetorical structure the epilogue of the letter. And here you're going to see that there is going to be an echo to the way in which Paul began this letter to the Galatians. (Just – V-42)

The echo is going to be a liturgical one. That just as at the beginning of the letter by saying: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. And he ends with glory forever and ever Amen. So also he is going to end in a liturgical way here. And what he's doing is he's bringing the Galatians back into the presence of God. Which in a sense they've been in all along. Because this is a homily. And it's in the context of a worship service. But he's acknowledging the fact that they are in the presence of God. And he is bringing them to the point where they recognize that here at the end he is going to accent the major themes that he wants to accent in this letter to the Galatians. (Just – V-42)

Now, here is the surprise -- at least it always surprised me. And I think I do now understand why. But it took me a while to fully grasp and appreciate what Paul is doing here. What surprises here is that he returns to that theme of circumcision, which your very question alerts us to. That's an astute question.

Because it shows us clearly that Paul is returning to a theme that you know you think he has said enough about it. But it is still such an issue that he feels he needs to address it one more time. (Just – V-42)

Now, this final part of the letter is also one in which he returns to Christ crucified. And in a way he introduces a new concept or at least a new way of speaking of that concept. And that is the concept of new creation. But we're going to see that that is a way in which he has been talking about the Gospel all along. And now he names it new creation. Now, what is a surprise to a certain extent is that he doesn't return to what we think of as one of the major themes of Paul's letter to the Galatians. And certainly what we confess as Lutherans to be the major theme of Paul's epistle. And that is justification by grace through faith. He does not return to that. We're going to address that in a moment in another question. But I do want to put on the table right now as we begin to look at this epilogue that there are some things about it that surprise us. Now let's begin by looking at the concept of circumcision. And to do that, we need to get into the epilogue. (Just – V-42)

Hellenistic letters typically close with the sender's wish for the good health of the recipient(s) and a farewell word, such as "I pray for your health continually together with that of your children. Farewell." Pauline letter closings tend to be lengthier and include certain recurring elements:

1. The commendation of particular individuals to the church: Rom 16:1–2; 1 Cor 16:15–18
2. A letter signature indicating that the letter comes from Paul: 1 Cor 16:21–22; Gal 6:11
3. Greetings to particular individuals within the church and/or greetings from those with Paul to the church: Rom 16:3–15, 21–23; 1 Cor 16:19–20a; 2 Cor 13:12b (ET 13:13); Phil 4:21–22; Philemon 23–24; in conjunction with the greeting, there is often an exhortation to extend a "holy kiss" to each other: Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20b; 2 Cor 13:12a
4. An exhortation, warning, or summary of Paul's argument: Rom 16:17–20a; 1 Cor 16:13–14; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:12–17
5. A doxology: Rom 16:24–27
6. A request that the letter be read to all: 1 Thess 5:27; cf. Col 4:16
7. A closing benediction or grace: Rom 16:20b; 1 Cor 16:23–24; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; Philemon 25

Paul does not employ these elements woodenly. No one letter exhibits the full pattern. Galatians includes only a signature device (no. 2—Gal 6:11), a final warning summarizing Paul's exhortation (no. 4; Gal 6:12–17), and a closing grace (no. 7; Gal 6:18). Paul does not commend individuals (no. 1); he does not greet particular members of the churches nor request that they greet one another with a holy kiss (no. 3). These omissions may be explained by Paul's intent that this document serve as a circular letter for the various churches in Galatia. Another possibility is that these omissions reflect the strain in his relations with the Galatians because of the conflict over circumcision and the Law. At the beginning of the letter, Paul replaces his traditional opening thanksgiving with a statement of rebuke (1:6–10). Correspondingly, his closing does not include a note of praise, thanksgiving, or joy, or a doxology (cf. Rom 16:19a, 25–27; 1 Cor 16:17; Phil 4:10, 20; 1 Tim 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18). Despite these omissions, Galatians' closing (6:11–18) remains one of the longest in the Pauline corpus as Paul seizes the opportunity to reinforce the key points he has made with respect to the dispute. He begins by drawing attention to his personal autograph (6:11). He then devotes four verses to an extended contrast of the false Gospel and selfish motives of his rivals with the true Gospel and his own selfless motives (6:12–15). His peace benediction is conditional on the Galatians' following the rule that he has laid down (6:16; cf. Rom 15:33; 16:20a; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9b; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16). In a surprising turn of phrase, he speaks of an "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). He openly challenges anyone who would cause him trouble (6:17). With the final "amen!" intended to punctuate the public reading of the letter, Paul signals that the Galatians were never dealing with just him. All along they have been dealing with the one who sent him, "our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:18; cf. 1:3–

5). With the peace benediction (6:16) and the closing grace benediction (6:18), he still hopes to win back the Galatians.

Paul initially draws attention to himself with the autograph in 6:11. Then he juxtaposes himself and his Gospel message with the rivals and their message. Note the first person references throughout this paragraph (6:11–17), with four in 6:17! The rivals boast in circumcising the Galatians (6:12–13), whereas Paul boasts in the cross of Christ (6:14). They avoid persecution for the cross (6:12), whereas Paul bears on his body the marks of persecution for the sake of Jesus (6:17). The rivals are compelling the Galatians to be circumcised (6:12–13), whereas Paul firmly maintains that circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter (6:15). The rivals live in the “world” and are yielding to its power (6:14), whereas Paul lives in the “new creation” in Christ (6:15). *Each of these contrasts revolves around the significance of the cross of Christ* (cf. 1:4; 2:19–21; 3:1, 13; 5:11, 24). Paul may refer to himself extensively in this paragraph, but he remains clear that he is a servant of the cross. It is the cross that is at stake. The Galatians should make no mistake about that. Justification takes place through the cross, and the Christian life always bears a cruciform shape. The rivals’ teaching has struck at the heart of the Christ-centered, apostolic message. This closing paragraph therefore crystallizes the key issues of the letter for the Galatians. (CC)

**6:11** πηλίκους (“with what large [letters]!”)—The interrogative pronoun πηλίκος (“how large?”) may be used as an exclamation (“how large!”). The dative πηλίκους is attested by most manuscripts, but its classical form, ῥηλίκους, is the variant reading in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  B\* 33.

γράμμασιν (“letters”)—Paul is referring to the handwritten characters he is writing and not to his epistles. Had Paul been referring to his epistles, he would have employed the accusative case of the plural of ἐπιστολή, “epistle” (ἐπιστολάς), rather than the dative case of the plural of γράμμα, “letter (of the alphabet)” (γράμμασιν) as the object of γράφω, “write.” Paul consistently employs the word ἐπιστολή for “epistles, letters” (seventeen instances). This verse does not refer, then, to his writing of long letters. (CC\_

*See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand!* Paul directs the Galatians’ attention (“see!” ἴδετε) to the large letters which he wrote (ἔγραψα) in his own handwriting (τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ). The letter’s carrier would take the same handwritten copy to the various Galatian congregations. What remains unclear is whether Paul’s past (aorist) tense verb ἔγραψα is to be taken as a true past (“I wrote”) or as an epistolary convention from the temporal perspective of the recipients (“I am writing”), i.e., when they will read the letter, his writing will be a past event. If the aorist tense is indeed referring to the past (“I wrote”), then Paul is drawing attention to the entire letter as the product of his own hand.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps he had maintained a strained and difficult style of large letters throughout the entire document. That an entire letter would be written in such an unwieldy, cumbersome style seems unlikely. If Paul had been writing by his own hand with such conspicuous letters from the very beginning, why would he call attention to it only here at the *end* of the letter? More likely, Paul is employing an epistolary aorist as he does frequently elsewhere in his letters (“I am writing,” ἔγραψα, in Rom 15:15; 1 Cor 5:11; 9:15; Philemon 19, 21; cf. “I am sending,” ἔπεμψα, in Phil 2:28; Col 4:8; ἀνέπεμψα in Philemon 12). (CC)

Ancient records (e.g., P.Oxy. 265, 499, 513) and letters (e.g., P.Lond. 897, 1173) often exhibit a different handwriting style in the conclusion or subscription from the rest of the document. Since no one would employ a secretary for just the conclusion of a document, the different handwriting at the end would be the author’s own (e.g., P.Oxy. 264). Ancient authors would frequently grab a pen at the end of a dictated letter and add a signature, additional exhortation, a final farewell, and/or a closing personal note. Paul’s signature at this point would make perfect sense had he employed a scribe as he does for other letters (e.g., Tertius in Rom 16:22). Secretaries could compose letters on the basis of an author’s rather general comments. Other authors would dictate letters more closely or word-for-word. The letter to the Galatians, because of the seriousness of the situation and the strong feelings involved, was probably an instance of word-for-word dictation. On occasion Paul’s coworkers probably acted as scribes for his dictation—perhaps another reason he referred to them in his greetings (Paul with Sosthenes in 1 Cor 1:1; Paul with

Timothy in Col 1:1; Paul “and all the brothers with me” in Gal 1:2!). The apostle has, in all likelihood, grabbed the reed from his scribe or coworker to write these additional comments (6:11–18) in his own hand. (CC)

As a rhetorical device, Paul is also signaling his *literacy* in the midst of a largely illiterate Greco-Roman world. He is therefore a learned man who should not be dismissed in his interpretation of the Scriptures or the faith. Even among the educated elite, many of those who could read could not themselves write. Paul is able not only to employ a scribe to do much of the writing on his behalf but also to write the final paragraph in his *own* hand. Paul would effectively be saying: “Look, I can write, but I can avoid doing so. Most of you can do neither, so listen to me.”<sup>28</sup> What is at stake is too important to do otherwise. (CC)

The return to the topic of circumcision in 6:12–16 represents a break from the discussion in 5:13–6:10 and hearkens back to the impassioned pleas earlier in 5:1–12. By writing in his own hand, Paul places his full personal authority behind the closing words on this critical topic. Most likely, he intends in 6:11 to draw attention to the closing section (6:11–18). Nothing in 6:11 or the remainder of the section justifies the speculation that the apostle had injured his hand or was weak in sight (cf. 4:15). An attempt to win the audience’s sympathy because of poor eyesight would clash with the very strong words that follow.<sup>31</sup> To employ large letters—and to draw attention to them in 6:11—is Paul’s way of underscoring the seriousness of what follows. The public reader could *show* the gathered assembly Paul’s personal script. “Pay attention: this is your mother in the gospel speaking!” (4:19). (CC)

*large letters.* May have been for emphasis or, as some have suggested, because he had poor eyesight. (CSB)

Paul wrote the conclusion for two reasons: to authenticate the Letter (cf 2Th 3:17) and to emphasize its main points. (TLSB)

First of all, in Verse 11 Paul is using an imperative here. I think it's his last imperative. And he says it very clearly to them. Look -- this is see. Look at this, you know. This is a very I think poignant personal moment in the epistle. He says: Look at what large letters I am writing in my own hand. Now, there are a couple of things here that I want to accent. First of all, and we haven't talked about this, this letter was most likely dictated. That's one of the reasons why the grammar is sometimes a little bit tough. The way in which Paul is speaking it out must have been such that everything was not lined up perfectly grammatically. He had what is called an amanuensis, someone who is actually writing down what he says. Now obviously Paul would check it over and make sure it is what he wanted to say. But it is dictated essentially. Now, here you can see Paul is going to handwrite these last words. And I think you can see as we go through them how carefully crafted they are. (Just – V-42)

*with my own hand.*† The letter up to this point had probably been dictated to a scribe, after which Paul took the pen in his own hand and finished the letter. Most likely Paul’s handwriting was noticeably inferior to the penmanship of the professional scribe, since Paul was accustomed to the task of a tentmaker, which included working with canvas sails and large ropes (hawsers) for ships. (CSB)

Paul customarily used scribes when composing his Letters, but added a personal postscript (cf Rm 16:22; Col 4:18). (TLSB)

Now, there is something important about this. This is something that I have thought about a lot in terms of our own culture today. When I grew up, I went away to school very young. And I wrote a lot of letters. My mother wrote me letters. I had old girlfriends who wrote me letters. And occasionally my father would write me a letter. My grandmother would. I have a collection of a lot of letters from when I was young. And I find when I receive a handwritten letter from someone, it is a very poignant



experience. Because when you write something with your own hand, it reveals something of you. Your personality comes out. And you can -- you know, you can see kind of the care that somebody takes in sitting down with a pen and in their own handwriting, writing out a personal note to you. (Just – V-42)

It was the same for the Galatians to see Paul's handwriting. And there has been this idea that Paul had trouble with his eyes. Remember the bulging eyes and pluck out my eyes and give them to you. He says: Look at what large letters I'm writing. I think Paul had a very large handwriting because of his eyes. And that's what was so distinguishing about his handwriting. So here Paul is saying: Hey, I'm going to take up the pen now. Because what I'm going to write to you, it's very personal. It's very direct. And I am going to take extra care here to speak in my own handwriting, in my own way of speaking by means of this pen exactly what I want to say to you about the final words to you as your pastor, who founded you, who loves you, who preached the truth of the Gospel to you. Here are my final words. I think this is just one of those extraordinary moments. Now, this isn't the only example of somebody taking up the pen at the end of the letter when there's an amanuensis. So this isn't unique. But I think Paul, especially the way he says: Look at what large letters I'm writing to you, it is a very important thing. (Just – V-42)

### **The Rivals' Boast: Circumcision (6:12–13) (CC)**

**6:12** ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς—The verb is a conative present, “are *trying* to compel you.” The compulsion consists of verbal pressure and persuasion. Cf. Gal 2:3: οὐδὲ Τίτος ... ἠναγκάσθη περιτμηθῆναι.

τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ—The dative is causal: “*because of* the cross of Christ.” The expanded reading ... Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (“... of Christ Jesus”), in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  B and a few minuscules, may reflect the influence of 6:14.

μὴ διώκονται (“they may not be persecuted”)—This present subjunctive passive is well attested. The present indicative passive διώκονται (“they are not persecuted”) in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  A C F G K L P is probably the result of itacism, an accidental substitution of a vowel or diphthong for another pronounced the same (here -o- for -ω-). (CC)

*As many who want to present a good face with respect to the flesh—these people are trying to compel you to be circumcised, only in order that they may not be persecuted because of the cross of Christ.* In returning to attack mode, Paul speaks in derogatory terms of the people who want to “present a good face” by compelling the Galatians to be circumcised. The verb “present a good face/showing” (εὐπροσωπῶ) is not attested elsewhere in ancient Greek literature with the exception of the non-literary Greek papyri (P.Tebt. 19.12–13; 114 BC). Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the first century BC employs the cognate noun, literally, “good face” or “fair appearance” (εὐπροσωπία, *Ant. rom.* 3.11.3), and the corresponding adjective, literally, “fair of face” or “pleasing in appearance,” is widely attested (see εὐπρόσωπος in LXX Gen 12:11). The verb’s meaning in Gal 6:12 would have been obvious: in a world preoccupied with honor and shame, these people want to present a good “face” (πρόσωπον). They want to make a good impression. Modern churches can fall prey to this pitfall as well: The danger is to present an impressive outward show and yet to ignore proud and unrepentant hearts. (CC)

When Paul writes “present a good face (or showing) with respect to the flesh,” he never clarifies if the “flesh” to which he refers is that of the Galatians or the rival teachers. The rivals could very well be seeking to make a good showing in *the Galatians’* flesh! Statues of the naked human body in antiquity offered just such a good showing in the flesh. The rivals, however, are advocating a good showing in the flesh that would ironically involve what was commonly perceived by gentiles as a  *mutilation* of that flesh (see 5:12). Their good showing in the “face” also involves a *different* body part! The dark humor is a product of the age. Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* offers a comic role to the phallus even as a fourth-century BC clay figurine depicts a comic actor in the characteristic, short padded dress with phallus attached. “Paul employs barbed humor, inviting the Galatians to laugh at the Teachers, as though they were actors in one

of Aristophanes' comedies. In actuality, the Teachers' attention, he says, is focused neither on the Spirit (6:12a) nor on the Law (6:13a), but rather on the penis, and specifically on their own reputation as its cultic surgeons (cf. 5:12)!" Whereas Paul hopes that Christ would be formed *in* the Galatians (4:19), his rivals are focused entirely on the outward flesh, and on the most crass element of that anatomy. Even more sadly, they are handing themselves over to the very *power* of the flesh they had hoped to combat through their surgical procedure (3:3; 5:13–6:10). (CC)

The “only” (μόνον) clause is adverbial and emphasizes that the rivals' motivation to compel the Galatians to be circumcised is primarily (“only”) in order to avoid persecution “because of the cross of Christ.” The apostle knows firsthand what sort of persecution the proclamation of the cross can bring, both as a former persecutor and as one who has himself suffered (1:13–15; 6:17). Paul never explains *why* the rivals would suffer persecution if they did not promote the circumcision of the gentile Galatians. Certainly Paul suffered much for his convictions from synagogue Jews (2 Cor 11:24–25). Robert Jewett supposed that in the late forties and early fifties AD Judean Zealots were exerting pressure on the Christians to observe the Mosaic Law. Such pressure was particularly intense during the governorships of Tiberius Julius Alexander (AD 46–48) and his successor Ventidius Cumanus (AD 48–52) as the Zealots engaged in a militant program of purging gentile influence from the holy land of Israel. Jewett thought that this increase in Zealotic activity motivated the Jewish Christians in Judea to promote the proper observance of circumcision and Moses' Law among their fellow believers in order to spare the fledgling movement from reprisals by the Zealots. Paul's rivals, as ethnic Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, would have evoked suspicion because of their association with non-Law-observant, Christ-believing gentiles. The Zealots would have acted harshly against Jewish Christians who compromised their devotion to the Torah and circumcision. Paul himself had acted violently against compromisers (Galatians 1). The Zealotic movement, however, was limited to Judea. Jewett has not been able to explain why Paul's rivals would have traveled all the way to Galatia to promote circumcision in order to avoid persecution hundreds of miles away in Judea. (CC)

Bruce Winter has hypothesized instead that gentile Christians risked persecution for abandoning the emperor cult. The failure to perform their idolatrous patriotic duties would be ameliorated by adhering to Judaism, since the Jewish community enjoyed the legal right to avoid participation in such idolatrous cults. The Jewish Christ-believers therefore were encouraging the gentile Christ-believers to be circumcised in order to avoid persecution. Although emperor worship was increasing in popularity and influence throughout the first century AD, the governing authorities did not *enforce* emperor worship, even sporadically, until the last decade of the first century, contra Winter. Winter is only able to point to neighborly peer pressure that would not likely impact a tiny, inconspicuous religious movement newly born within the larger Greco-Roman world in the middle of the first century. Paul, for his part, does not mention the emperor cult as a factor in the rivals' or the Galatians' motivations. He never alludes to any pressure on the gentiles from the governing authorities. He never mentions other gentiles at Galatia who might be pressuring the Christ-believers. Throughout Galatians persecution always derives from Jewish groups or communities, and never from pagan communities or the government (see 1:13, 23 [Paul himself!]; 4:29; 5:11; cf. 2 Cor 11:24–25). Ultimately, this hypothesis flounders on the myth of the *religio licita*, as if Roman officials actually *cared* about the diversity of religious expressions in the empire. The only times governing officials showed any real concern was when a religious movement proved subversive or a threat to the Roman political order. (CC)

Hypotheses such as Jewett's or Winter's are unnecessary. The concerns at Galatia were more immediate. The larger Jewish community in Galatia likely held in suspicion fellow (Christ-believing) Jews who seemed to be abandoning the fundamental convictions of their ancient religion by accepting gentiles without circumcision. In proselytizing gentile Christians through circumcision, the rival Jewish-Christian missionaries could reassure fellow Jews that they had not abandoned their core convictions as Jews. Would not an emphasis on circumcision soften the offensiveness of the cross? For Paul, the supposed

entry rite was in reality an exit rite! The gentiles were acceptable before God on the sole basis of their being in Christ, not by their joining ethnic Israel. The cross and circumcision represent two very different approaches to acceptance by God. The rivals are compelling the Galatians in the same way those who infiltrated the Jerusalem meeting were trying to compel Titus to be circumcised (2:3–5). Will the Galatians resist what Paul is exposing as sheer manipulation? To yield on the point, no matter how convenient, would be to surrender the most fundamental conviction that Christ's cross is sufficient to save. (CC)

*force you to be circumcised.* Cf. 2:3. (CSB)

Then he goes now into circumcision. And this is really interesting. Verse 12 you can see that Paul is still agitated. And he's not going to let go. Look at what he says in Verse 12. He says: Those who wish to make a good showing in the flesh -- now we'll talk about what that means in a minute. But to make a good showing in the flesh. These are the ones who are compelling you, that's present tense. Are compelling you and keep on compelling you to be circumcised. There's circumcision. Only -- except -- only in order that they are not persecuted for the cross of Christ. (Just – V-42)

Now, let's stop there for a minute. These others now he's talking about, these opponents of Paul, they want to make a good showing in the flesh. Now, the flesh here is of course a reference to circumcision. They want to boast in -- well, let's just say it plainly. They want to boast in dead foreskins. That's what they want to boast in. That's what circumcision is. And in order for them to do that -- and here is that language we've heard on a number of occasions in the epistle, it comes up again and again, this compulsion, this absolute necessity, they are compelling you to be circumcised. As I said, that's present. Over and over again they are doing this. So it's persistent. And the reason is is that they don't want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Now, this is the first time where Paul has stated in as bold a way as he is here that the real reason that circumcision is kind of this compelling thing for his opponents is because they are a little bit embarrassed by the cross of Christ. And maybe even more than a little. Now, I have said that his opponents certainly agree that Christ was crucified. He was raised from the dead. They are not denying the crucifixion of Jesus. But this is not what they preach. They would rather preach circumcision than the cross of Jesus Christ. (Just – V-42)

*be persecuted.* By advocating circumcision (see 5:11) the Judaizers were less apt to experience opposition from the Jewish opponents to Christianity. They were thinking only of themselves. (CSB)

If the Judaizers actually would preach the cross of Christ (i.e., the Gospel) like Paul and drop insistence on circumcision, they would incur the wrath of non-Christian Jews. By compelling circumcision, they deleted “Christ alone” from their message and thus assuaged hard-line Jewish critics. (TLSB)

**6:13** οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι (“the circumcised”)—The present substantival participle is supported by ⲕ A C D K P as well as by the present tense of the περιτέμνω verb forms in 5:2–3. The perfect participle οἱ περιτετμημένοι is supported by Ⲡ<sup>46</sup> B L Ψ, among others. The external evidence for these two readings is evenly matched. The perfect tense probably represents scribal modification and appears to be clarifying that the rival teachers, as Jewish Christians, are in view: “those who have been circumcised” or “who are in the state of circumcision.” (CC)

*For the circumcised do not themselves keep the Law, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order that they might boast about your flesh.* The present-tense participle that functions as the subject of 6:13, “the circumcised” (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι), is ambiguous. Is this participle in the middle voice or the passive voice? Does the participle refer to the gentile Galatian Christians or to the rival Jewish-Christian teachers? Perhaps the participle refers to rivals who are not Jewish Christians as such but rather a subgroup of Paul's own Galatian gentile Christian converts who have converted yet again: “those who

receive (for themselves) circumcision” (middle voice).<sup>51</sup> This subgroup of gentile converts to Judaism could now be urging the other gentile Galatians to receive circumcision. Paul criticizes “the circumcised” for not keeping the Law. As new converts to Judaism, these gentiles’ observance presumably fell short of the norm for ordinary Jews. Such a critique would surely have reinforced these former-gentiles’ thinking that they needed to observe (and advocate) the Law more fully. Paul would be *reinforcing* their point of view on the need to keep the Law. (CC)

On the other hand, the critique of a failure to observe the Law properly would be more effective if levied against rival teachers who were established Jewish Christians, from whom more would be expected. Nothing explicitly identifies the rivals as gentile Christian converts to Judaism, whether from Galatia or from elsewhere. Had Paul intended to refer to gentile converts to Judaism at Galatia, he would have been better served to use “those who *were* circumcised” and to add “*among you*” (οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν περιτμηθέντες), with the *aorist* passive substantival participle (“*were*”) instead of the *present* middle-passive participle περιτεμνόμενοι, “the (ones who *are*) circumcised.” Had he been referring to gentile converts to Judaism from *elsewhere*, he would have been better served to use “those who *have been* circumcised” (οἱ περιτετμημένοι), the *perfect* passive substantival participle. In the context of the letter as a whole, Paul’s rivals are claiming an ideological connection to the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem—thus “the present Jerusalem” in 4:21–31 and the prominence of Jerusalem in 1:17–2:14. The rival teachers appear to be Jewish followers of Christ and not gentiles who are recent converts to Judaism. (CC)

Some have contended that “the circumcised” in 6:13a are gentile converts to Judaism and that this label would distinguish them from the Jewish Christian rivals, who are the subject in 6:12 and 6:13b. More likely, however, Paul’s referent in 6:12–13 remains consistently the Jewish Christian rivals. First, the subject of the verb in 6:13b is clearly the rivals: “*they* want you to be circumcised.” Likewise, in 6:12 Paul speaks of those people who are “trying to compel you [Galatians] to be circumcised.” A change in subject from Jewish-Christian rivals in 6:12 to the Galatian recipients of circumcision (“the circumcised”) in 6:13a and then back again to the Jewish-Christian rivals in 6:13b is unnecessarily harsh and contextually unsignaled. Second, Paul regularly distinguishes the Galatian audience by second person forms from his rivals in the third person (see e.g., 1:6–9). “The circumcised” (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι), in the third person here, would not refer to the gentile addressees; Paul remains exclusively focused in 6:13 on the activities of the rivals. He is using “the circumcised” for rhetorical effect for those for whom circumcision is crucial. (CC)

Paul criticizes “the circumcised” for not keeping the Law themselves. This is intra-Jewish sectarian rhetoric. The rivals do not keep the Law as strictly or as properly as they should.<sup>61</sup> In insisting on circumcision, the rivals have already portrayed themselves as rigorous in their approach to the Law. Paul is undermining their reputation with the shocking news to the Galatians that the rivals are not so scrupulous after all. They are not consistent in their message!<sup>63</sup> Paul is likely continuing the train of thought with respect to Moses’ Law that he initiated in 3:10 and resumed in 5:3. Paul knew what it took to observe the Law and judged them to be falling short (1:14; Phil 3:4–6). Further, he sees in the Law no effective provision for failure. In the middle of the second century AD, Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 46) depicts Trypho the Jew speaking of the impossibility of doing the entire Law since the sacrificial system at the temple had been abolished. Since people do not observe and obey the entire Law as they should, they experience its curse (3:10). Either the Law solves the problem of sin and transgression or Christ does (2:21; 3:21). For Paul, the answer should be obvious. (CC)

The circumcised rivals “*want*” (θέλουσιν, 6:13) the gentile Galatians to be circumcised. Apparently their work is not yet finished. Once completed, the rivals will be able to boast in the Galatians’ flesh as their foreskins become trophies. The rival teachers may not themselves keep the Law, but they will take advantage of the Galatians (note ὑμᾶς, “you,” and ὑμετέρα, “your,” over against αὐτοί, “they themselves”)! Dunn has highlighted the cultural imperialism involved: “When Gentiles thus subjected

*their* flesh to the Jewish rite of circumcision, they gave Jews grounds to boast in *their* flesh thus subordinated to and incorporated within distinctive Jewish identity.” The gentiles will be incorporated into ethnic Israel. (CC)

Each instance of persecuting activity in the letter stems either from non-Christ-believing Jews or from Jewish Christians. Paul as a non-Christian Jew persecuted the Christian movement in 1:13, 23. The persecution in 2:3–4 was by false brothers insisting on circumcision. In 2:12 Peter was afraid of either Law-observant Jewish Christians or non-Christ-believing Jews. In 4:29 the child born according to the flesh, the present Jerusalem, sponsors persecution. In 5:11–12 Paul would escape persecution if he ceased preaching the cross. In 6:12–13 the Jewish-Christian rival teachers likely faced pressure from other Jews because of their association with the gentiles and because of their adherence to a sectarian messianic movement. By insisting on the circumcision of the gentile Galatian Christ-believers, the rivals would likely improve their standing among their co-religionists and thereby avoid the persecution mentioned in 6:12 (thus 6:13’s “for,” γὰρ). Sadly, the Jewish-Christian rivals have sold out the cross of Christ, the distinctive element of their faith.<sup>70</sup> These people will make a good showing in the *flesh*, but not in the Spirit! (CC)

Joining Paul in censuring the rival teachers at Galatia would be very easy. They had wrongly conjoined the Gospel message of Christ with a cultural imperialism of their own making. The cross of Christ was not enough! They insisted on gentiles becoming Jewish as well. Paul’s rivals were hardly unique in this regard. Christians through the centuries have regularly added elements of their own culture to the Gospel message. When do confessional Christians go beyond their moorings in the Scriptures to add unnecessary cultural elements of their own? Have particular worship practices from later centuries been canonized? Often ethnic pride and nationalism trump the saving Gospel. The sufficiency of the saving Gospel of Christ must be protected from any addition of human origin, no matter how well-intentioned. Believers in Christ have only one boast: they are constantly looking away from themselves to the cross of Christ! With the clarity granted through the Spirit’s work, that Christ-centered focus is a discipline. (CC)

*keep the law* - This sentence, “Those who receive circumcision do not keep the Law,” should be carefully noted; for it means that those who are circumcised are not really circumcised. It can be applied also to other works. Whoever does works, prays, or suffers apart from Christ, does his works, prays, and suffers in vain; for “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Therefore it does not do anyone any good to receive circumcision outwardly or to fast and pray, while inwardly he goes on despising grace, the forgiveness of sins, faith, Christ, etc., and remains arrogant in his self-confidence and presumption about his own righteousness, all of which are horrible sins against the First Table. These are then accompanied by sins against the Second Table, such as disobedience, sexual lust, rage, anger, hatred, etc. Thus he speaks accurately when he says: “Those who receive circumcision do not keep the Law but merely give the outward appearance of keeping it.” For such pretense is a double wickedness in the sight of God. (Luther)

*may boast about your flesh* – To enhance their own standing in Jewish eyes, the circumcision party hypocritically bragged about their success in getting Gentile converts to accept circumcision (cf Ti 1:10–11). (TLNB)

Now, Paul goes on in Verse 13 to again refer to the act of circumcision. And he says this: For even those who are circumcised. I think this is -- those who are circumcised -- these are the circumcised people -- are the very ones who are habitually being circumcised and insisting on circumcision. In other words, those who are obsessed with circumcision. For not even these keep the law. Guard the law. Keep the law is probably best for us to understand it. Keep the law. Because they wish -- and listen to this

carefully. Because they wish, they desire, to have you circumcised so that they might boast in your flesh. (Just – V-42)

Now, this puts on the table right here at the end of this epistle two diametrically opposed preachings. Preaching circumcision or preaching Christ crucified. And now that he's introduced this concept of circumcision and crucifixion into the end of his letter, he is now going to move it to a climax that is absolutely shocking. (Just – V-42)

### **Paul's Boast: The Cross of Christ (6:14–16) (CC)**

6:14 ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο (“but as for me, may I never”)—For the optative expression μὴ γένοιτο (“by no means!”), see the commentary on 2:17.

κόσμος ... κόσμῳ (“the world ... to the world”)—The noun κόσμος is anarthrous twice here and frequently elsewhere. “The world” reflects Paul’s apocalyptic worldview as one of the powers of “the present evil age” (1:4). The “world” stands for a former, fleshly reality under the Law and the “elements” (4:3, 9) that has passed away for those in Christ. (CC)

*But as for me, 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.* Paul juxtaposes himself over against his rivals: Note the emphatic “as for me” (ἐμοί; a dative of respect) placed at the very beginning of the Greek of 6:14 along with the contrastive “but” (δέ). Paul always employs the optative μὴ γένοιτο—usually rendered as “by no means!” but in this context as “may I never”—to express strong disagreement with a preceding statement or with a false inference that could be drawn from his teaching (see 2:17; 3:21; also, e.g., Rom 3:4, 6). The emphatic “as for me,” the contrastive “but,” and the optative expression together express a contrast in the starkest of terms. The Galatians must choose between two worldviews: Paul’s or the rivals’. These two world-views are in no way compatible. While the rivals boast in the Galatians’ flesh, Paul boasts in the cross of Christ, the very scandal the rivals are seeking to mitigate! (CC)

What people choose to boast of speaks volumes. Paul’s focus is centered exclusively on “our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). If only he could say the same for his rivals. For many people, their work has become their focus. Others focus on relationships or seek people’s approval (cf. Paul’s attitude toward human approval in 1:10). Others boast in worldly possessions or their accomplishments. Paul remains riveted on the crucifixion. In fact, there are *three crucifixions* in 6:14: Christ’s, Paul’s, and the world’s. Paul’s and the world’s crucifixions are expressed with the perfect tense “has been crucified” (ἐσταύρωται). Christ’s crucifixion has lingering effects in the crucifixion of Paul (cf. 2:20). “The life of the apostle is continuously being shaped by the once-and-for-all crucifixion of Christ.” Even the very world structured by the Law and circumcision has *itself* been crucified to Paul. The apostle is presenting himself as a model for *every* Christian in relation to the old age. (CC)

The prepositional phrase (δι’ οὗ) “through whom” or “through which” introduces the subordinate clause in the latter half of 6:14. The governing antecedent of the genitive relative pronoun οὗ could be “Christ” or “cross.” Paul is crucified to the world either through the person of Christ or through the cross. As the exclusive object of Paul’s boast, the “cross” receives the emphasis in the first part of 6:14 and is therefore the more likely antecedent of the pronoun, even if it is further from the pronoun than “Christ.” The decision between “Christ” or the “cross” as antecedent is ultimately moot since the meaning is not significantly different. The emphatic placement of “to me” (ἐμοί) in the latter half of 6:14 parallels the emphatic “to me” (ἐμοί) at the very beginning of 6:14. This pronoun (“to me”) does not signal some personal subjective opinion. Paul is boasting in a fitting fashion of his participation in an objective, new reality. According to Paul’s apocalyptic perspective, the “world” (κόσμος) has been crucified to him, and he to the “world.” One world has passed away and has been replaced by another (thus 6:15: “a new

creation”; cf. 2:19–20). Paul came to recognize in Christ that zeal for the Law belongs to an old world that is no more (1:4). If only the rivals had grasped the significance of this new age in Christ! (CC)

From a Roman standpoint, the cross symbolized defeat, humiliation, and shameful degradation. One simply did not utter *crux* in polite Roman circles. Crucifixion was usually reserved for slaves, violent criminals, and political rebels. For Paul and for the first Christians, this otherwise repugnant and horrific sight had become the symbol of God’s power! With Christ’s invasion of the cosmos, one world and its value system is being upended by a new order and a new value system.<sup>a</sup> That invasion is not yet finished. The present evil age (1:4) remains in bondage under the Law (3:23; 4:21; 5:1) and under the weak, beggarly elements (4:3, 9). The evil age is crucified, but it is not yet buried. What began with Christ’s cross and the granting of the Spirit (4:6: “sent forth,” ἐξαπέστειλεν, aorist tense) must continue until the crucifixion of this world is complete. For that reason, Paul employs the perfect tense “has been crucified” (ἔσταύρωται) for the crucifying of the world (6:14). For now, this new reality can only be seen through the eyes of faith “to” Paul (“to me,” ἐμοί) and “to” the Christian believer in 6:14. Unlike the Eastern mystic, the believer does not escape the present existence within the world, at least not yet. Rather, this present world and the flesh no longer dictate the believer’s thoughts or way of life.<sup>79</sup> The believer in Christ lives accordingly with eyes to see the structures of a world that is just now beginning to dawn. The “new creation” (6:15) comes with a *new Lord*, “our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). Those in Christ have therefore experienced a change of lordship (cf. 1:10; 4:12). (CC)

*boast except in the cross.* See 1Co 1:31; 2:2. (CSB)

A sharp paradox to v 13 and, in the first-century context, the height of foolishness and even madness (1Co 1:18). The cross symbolized a cruel, vulgar, shameful, and humiliating death reserved for slaves and criminals. Compressed in “cross” is the powerful message of salvation through Christ’s death. (TLSB)

This is a very powerful statement by Paul that I think sums up the entire theology of grace and the theology of the cross. And I think we need to pause here for a moment and ask ourselves as we come to the end of this letter and we see how Paul is coming back to Christ crucified what in fact the cross means and what it means then to boast in the cross of Jesus Christ. (Just – V-43)

The cross is for Paul a cosmic event. It is an Apocalyptic event because it affects the whole creation. Everything is different after the cross. And here is where God is in fact acting on behalf of fallen humanity that is infected with this virus of sin to make right in the cross what has gone wrong because of our sin. The cross then is a watershed event in the entire cosmos. And what Paul has been saying throughout this letter is it's not the law that is the cosmic event. It's not Mt. Sinai. It's not the delivery of the law to Moses by angels on Mt. Sinai. But it is the cross of Jesus Christ that is the watershed event. And if you accent the law, if you accent what Moses did and superimpose that upon people, then you are going to dilute the cosmic character of the cross of Jesus Christ. (Just – V – 43)

Now, this is an absolutely extraordinary statement for Paul. And let's look at exact language that he uses. Verse 14. And this is an expression he uses in other places. But it does stand out because it's fairly rare. And in the Greek you're kind of alerted to it. It's hard to sometimes translate. Let it not be to me to boast. Let me see how this translation does it. That is Verse 14. But far be it from me to boast. You know, I like let it be. Let it not be to me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Lord and mine, Gentile, Jews, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world. (Just – V-43)

Now, usually when you boast in something, it's either -- it's usually something that's yourself. You know, you boast in your own accomplishments. You boast in your golf score, the number of fish that you've caught off a particular fly. You know, you boast in your accomplishments. You can boast in your kids. A lot of people boast in their kids or their wife's accomplishments or their husband's or whatever. But

usually it's something personal. Here Paul is saying he's not going to boast in anything that he had anything to do with or anybody else had anything to do with humanly speaking. He's not going to boost in anybody's dead foreskins. He's not going to boast in his rhetorical prowess. He's not going to boast in the number of converts he's got. (Just – V-43)

*the world.* All that is against God. (CSB)

*crucified to me, and I to the world.* See 2:19–20; 5:24. (CSB)

“Although believers are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, in the present life this regeneration and renewal is not complete. It is only begun. Believers ... struggle constantly against the corrupt nature and character, which cleaves to us until death” (FC Ep VI 4). (TLSB)

And the third thing he's saying about the cross, and this is where we get that language of the world is crucified to me and I to the world. What the cross is is that defining moment in which the loss of one cosmos, namely, the world of the law, is lost to Paul. And there's the birth of a new cosmos. And that is the birth of the new creation. (Just – V-43)

That was his life before. But now the cross is where he gets his identity. And there, that law life, collided with Christ on the cross. Here this is Galatians 2 and 3. And it killed Jesus. There Jesus is cursed because he is the sinner. Cursed by the law. That is the defining moment for Paul. And it's there that the world, his former world of Judaism, is crucified in Christ. And if that's crucified in Christ, then so is Paul himself. Paul is crucified in that cross of Christ, which is just another way of talking about what happens to him in his baptism. (Just – V-43)

Now, this is a great contrast, as I said, to his opponents. And it places the cross here -- and if this is his first letter -- it places the cross in the final words to the Galatians at the center of his preaching. You know what he's going to say to the Corinthians. I will know nothing except Christ crucified. And I've always been intrigued by that because right before that he's in Athens and he mentions nothing of Christ crucified. I think he learns something from that. That even when you're with pagans, you've got to preach Christ crucified. So when he gets with pagans in Corinth, he says: I'm going to know nothing but Christ crucified to you. Preach nothing but Christ crucified. So the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the center of his preaching. And if you just remember back, remember he says of the. Oh, foolish Galatians, before whom I've publicly portrayed Jesus as crucified. Paul is now going to show very clearly how this crucified Jesus is evident in his own body. (Just – V-43)

**6:15** οὔτε γὰρ (“for neither”)—This shorter reading is well attested (℞<sup>46</sup> B Ψ 33 1175). Although excellent attestation favors ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε, “for *in Christ Jesus* neither” (⋈ A C D F G Textus Receptus, most minuscules and versions), this longer reading is likely a variant that assimilated 6:15 to the wording of 5:6. (CC)

*For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation [is everything]!* Gal 6:15 further explains (“for,” γὰρ) what the believer’s crucifixion to the world in 6:14 entails. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any real value. Paul blurts out “new creation”! “The broken syntax of the sentence expresses the utter discontinuity between the abolished cosmos and the new world.”<sup>82</sup> Ironically, the very rite that was supposed to distinguish the Jews *from* the rest of the world actually marked their participation *in* this present world. Those fixated on circumcision are missing out on the “new creation.” “New creation” could refer to an individual (as in “a new creature,” καινή κτίσις, in 2 Cor 5:17) or to the “creation” collectively (as in κτίσις, “creation,” without καινή, “new,” in Rom 8:19–22). “New creation” would neatly match the crucifixion to the world (6:14; cf. 2:19–20). Paul’s “new creation” language echoes Is 65:17 (cf. Is 65:17–25; 66:22): “For behold, I am about to create new



heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered nor arise upon the heart.” The promises of Scripture are becoming a reality not only for individuals but also for an entire created world! (CC)

The Jews in Paul’s day often looked forward to a “new creation” that would follow the destruction or renewal of this world. What the Jews eagerly anticipated, for Paul has already arrived in Christ. Paul uses the perfect tense in 6:14 (“has been crucified,” ἐσταύρωται) and then the present tense in 6:15 (“is,” ἐστίν) as he affirms both the “now” and “not yet” dimensions of this “new creation.” The emphasis for the Galatians must remain on the “now” as the rivals seek to denigrate the blessings that the Galatians are already enjoying in Christ. A genuine liberation from “the present evil age” has *already* taken place with Christ’s death for sins (1:4). In being crucified with Christ, the believer genuinely participates in the realities of the cross; believers are crucified to the world. “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (2:20). Christ is being formed within the Galatians (4:19). These surpassing new realities render circumcision and the cultic rituals of the old age obsolete. God’s people can no longer be identified with a single, ethnic entity. The Spirit of the “new creation” has exploded the boundary between Israel and the rest of humanity in order to create something larger and far grander. (CC)

*neither circumcision. Counts for nothing* – Does this mean that laws are evil? No. They are actually good and useful, but in their proper order and proper place, namely, in material and political matters, which cannot be administered without laws. In addition, we also observe certain ceremonies and laws in the churches, not because such observance counts for justification, but for the sake of good order, a good example, tranquility, and harmony, in accordance with the statement (1 Cor. 14:40): “All things should be done decently and in order.” But if laws are set forth and required as though their observance justified and their nonobservance damned, then they must be completely abrogated and repealed; otherwise Christ will lose His position and glory as the only One who justifies, sends the Spirit, etc. With these words Paul clearly affirms that neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. But since in Christ neither the laws of the Gentiles nor those of the Jews count for anything, it was a completely ungodly action when the pope compelled us to attach our confidence to his laws. (Luther)

*new creation.* In Christ man undergoes a transformation that results in an entirely new being. Creation again takes place (see 2Co 5:17). (CSB)

This whole new order of existence inaugurated through Jesus’ atoning death is a radical contrast to a world in which circumcision had religious significance. Those in Christ are already “a new creation” (2Co 5:17; cf Is 65:17; Rm 8:19–22). (TLSB)

Now, here is what Paul is saying I think right here at the end. And I think Verse 15 is one of the most profound statements in all of Paul's epistles. And you can't just pull it out. You've got to see it in a context. Paul speaks here about the cosmos in the previous verse. And we talked about what that means. This is the law world or the world of Christ crucified. Now he turns to the language of creation. And it's really interesting what he says here. He said after all these chapters of talking about circumcision and talking about the uncircumcised and talking about the law but particularly in terms of circumcision, you know at the end of the day, that's not what I want to talk about. Circumcision really is not what this is about. And it's not about uncircumcision. Circumcision and uncircumcision really don't matter. And what I really want to talk to you about is what does matter. And what matters -- and here I think we can even put it in this language: What really exists is not circumcision or uncircumcision. But what really exists, what really matters, is new creation. New creation. (Just – V-44)

Now that the new creation is here, Paul is going to speak about it in such a way that it becomes the norm. It becomes the rule. Or to use kind of the equivalent of the Greek language, it is the canon. It is what is

going to guide our lives. It's not the law that does it. It's the new creation. The new creation -- and I'm going to say this carefully. And I'm just using this as an example. The new creation is now our moral code. It's not a moral code. But it's like our moral code. It's what guides us. And that's exactly what Paul says. In Verse 16 he says: As many of you as -- and this is an important distinction here -- as walk along. Let me see how the translation does it here. Yeah. Who walk by this rule. Now that's how this translation is. But it's by this canon. As many of you who live by this canon is what he's saying. Remember he said: Walk in the Spirit and you do. As many of you walk along this canon, this rule. You know the canon of the Scriptures, that's what shows us what God wants us to know about him. The canon here is the new creation. As many of you who walk in this new creation, this is what you get. (Just – V-44)

**6:16** στοιχήσουσιν (“will follow”)—The strongest external attestation favors this future indicative (⋈ B C2 Ψ 0278 33 Textus Receptus). ℣<sup>46</sup> has the aorist subjunctive στοιχήσωσιν (“would follow”), and several Western witnesses (A C\* D F G) have the present indicative στοιχοῦσιν. For the meaning of στοιχέω, see the commentary on 5:25. The verb “follow” or “keep in step with” (στοιχέω) in this instance takes a dative of association; BDF § 193.

εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτούς (“peace be upon them”)—The Greek lacks an explicit verb. “Be” represents an understood verb, the optative form of εἰμί, “to be”; BDF § 128 (5). For the ἐπί of motion (“upon”), see Acts 10:10; Rom 2:9: blessing or curse rains down from heaven “upon” its recipients. ὅσοι, “as many (as),” and the third person pronoun αὐτούς, “them,” generalize the statement beyond the Galatian readers. (CC)

*And as many who will follow this rule, peace be upon them and mercy even upon the Israel of God.* Paul signals the utter seriousness of these matters by a conditional benediction on all “who will follow this rule.” The conditional blessing here matches the conditional curse in 1:6–9. The apostle has been urging the Galatians to “walk” or “keep in step” (στοιχῶμεν) with the Spirit (5:25), which includes “following” or “keeping in step” (στοιχήσουσιν, another form of the same verb) with Paul’s rule (6:16). Ironically, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be reduced to a “rule.”<sup>90</sup> God’s blessing of peace and mercy depends on the behavior of the Spirit-led Galatians! Paul has no problem exhorting the Galatians with the principles that structure this new reality. A “rule” (κανόν) in this context is a standard for measuring, not a collection of texts or “canon” as in later usage. “This rule” (τῷ κανόνι **τούτῳ**) refers not to circumcision or uncircumcision but rather to the new creation—the concept Paul just blurted out at the end of 6:15. All that matters is the new creation. Only the Spirit of God can enable people to discern this new reality. Nevertheless, the new creation is itself juxtaposed with the irrelevance of circumcision and uncircumcision. Another possible understanding of “this rule,” then, lies in the relationship of 6:15 (which begins with “for,” γάρ) and 6:16 as support for 6:14: The priority of the new creation (6:15) is precisely why Paul as a “rule” (6:16) will boast only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (6:14) and not in this world (6:14) nor in its distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision (6:15). The “as many who” (ὅσοι) follow Paul’s “rule” in 6:16 are taking the opposite approach to the “as many who” (ὅσοι) in 6:12, “who want to present a good face with respect to the flesh.” (CC)

Paul pronounces God’s “peace” and “mercy” to “be upon them” (ἐπ’ αὐτούς) and “upon” (ἐπί) the “Israel of God.” “Peace” (εἰρήνη) comes from the Jewish salutation of שָׁלוֹם, *shalom*: “Peace be upon Israel” (Pss 125:5; 128:6). “Mercy” (ἔλεος) recalls God’s kindness and faithfulness to his promises; in the LXX ἔλεος is the normal translation of the Hebrew חֶסֶד, *hesed* (e.g., Ex 34:7; Num 14:19). Elsewhere in the NT, whenever “mercy” (ἔλεος) is joined to “peace” (εἰρήνη), “mercy” as the cause *precedes* “peace” as the result (see 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 Jn 3; Jude 2; so also LXX Is 54:10). Gal 6:16’s reversed order is unprecedented, even for Paul. Some commentators have theorized that the reversed order in 6:16 may reflect the influence of either the Nineteenth Benediction in the Jewish male’s daily prayer or a precursor

to that benediction: “Bestow peace, happiness and blessing, grace and loving-kindness and mercy upon us and upon all Israel, your people.” This Jewish benediction refers to God’s “peace” and “mercy.”<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, Paul’s language does not display any obvious dependence on the Nineteenth Benediction, which was possibly not yet in existence. Other scholars try to account for Paul’s language of “peace” and “mercy” by suggesting an allusion to Ps 125:5 (LXX 124:5) and/or Ps 128:6 (LXX 127:6); cf. *Pss. Sol.* 9:11; 11:9, but the psalm passages mention only “peace upon Israel” and not “mercy.” In Is 54:10, a more promising text, the prophet speaks of “mercy” (רַחֲמִים) and then “peace” (שָׁלוֹם), an otherwise unusual combination, and he does so within a context of God’s impending new creation of *Israel*.<sup>100</sup> “Peace,” “mercy,” Israel, and the concept of new creation are also in Gal 6:15–16. Perhaps Paul is echoing Isaiah. Unfortunately, this suggestion is unlikely as well since the connection ultimately relies on only two shared words, “peace” and “mercy,” neither of which is particularly unusual for Paul or Isaiah. Moreover, the order of the two words is *reversed* in Paul’s unusual syntactical formulation. Although Isaiah discusses what God will do in the future age, the apostle does not draw on any of the prophet’s distinctive language. That passage of Isaiah does not use the language of “new creation” or envision a world in which circumcision is irrelevant. Paul, on the other hand, refers to a “new creation” where there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision (Gal 6:15). At best, an echo of Is 54:10 is possible, but any interpretation of Gal 6:16 should not rely on a weak potential echo. The reversed order of “peace” and “mercy” remains a mystery. (CC)

Paul employs the peculiar phrase “the Israel of God” (6:16). Some specialists have theorized that this may be the terminology of the rivals since the phrase figures nowhere else in the letter. Paul refers to “the Israel of God” immediately after asserting that circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter. If he is employing the language of his rivals, then he has taken that language, redefined it, and employed it *against* them! He would have redefined Israel in such a way that ethnic Israel per se has been excluded apart from faith in the Gospel message about Christ. On the other hand, “Israel of God” is nowhere employed in Second Temple Judaism or in early rabbinic literature. The lack of any parallel militates against the notion that Paul is drawing on the Jewish rivals’ language. This is likely his own ironic formulation. (CC)

The wording of 6:16 is unusually awkward and capable of varying interpretations. The prepositional phrase “upon them” is peculiarly placed *between* “peace” and “mercy” in the original Greek (and the translation above). Is “peace” only to be “upon *them*” (ἐπ’ αὐτούς) and “mercy” only “upon the Israel of God” (ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ)? Should “them” be distinguished as a first group separate from “the Israel of God” as a second group? Perhaps *both* “peace” and “mercy” are “upon” both “them” and “the Israel of God” as separate groups? Or perhaps “them” and “the Israel of God” are, in fact, one and the *same* group? Three interpretive options are therefore available:

1. “Peace” and “mercy” be upon “them,” namely, “the Israel of God”—both blessings upon the same group (“them” = “the Israel of God”).
2. “Peace” and “mercy” be upon both “them” and also upon “the Israel of God”—both blessings upon each of the two separate groups.
3. “Peace” be upon “them” and “mercy” be upon “the Israel of God”—separate blessings for separate groups. (CC)

### Option 1

Most interpreters have seized upon the presence of the Greek καί (“and/also/namely”) immediately before the words “upon the Israel of God” (ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ) and have maintained that this word should be translated as “namely” (an epexegetical καί), in which case 6:16b would read: “Peace be upon them and mercy, *that is*, upon the Israel of God.” The “them” group would be identical to “the Israel of God.” Paul has spent the bulk of this letter blasting circumcision and Moses’ Law (the distinguishing marks of

the OT Israel) as entry requirements for the people of God in Christ. The contrast between circumcision and the cross of Christ in 6:11–16 is the parting shot. Gal 6:16b would therefore conclude with a rhetorically powerful redefinition of “the Israel of God.” “The Israel of God” is a new entity that includes both Jews and gentiles in Christ. An “Israel of God” inclusive of the gentiles in 6:16 would recall the apostle’s description of the Galatian gentile Christians in terms of “the Jerusalem above,” “*our* mother” (4:26, 28–29). Jew and gentile have been brought together once and for all in Christ (Gal 3:26–29) as the true children of Abraham (3:6) and of Sarah, “the free woman” (4:30–31). “The Israel of God” would parallel “the church of God” in 1:13. God’s peace and mercy are only for the Israel that recognizes the “rule” (6:16) of 6:15—a fierce parting shot paralleling 1:8–9’s repeated anathema. Whereas the rivals had been fervently trying to incorporate the gentile Galatians into Israel, Paul would be clarifying that the Galatians are *already* part of Israel, “the Israel of God,” the *true* Israel! The first option neatly conforms to the message of the letter. (CC)

Four difficulties render option 1 the least likely. First, this approach relies on taking the intervening καί epexegetically as “namely/that is.” An uncontested instance of an epexegetical καί (“namely”) is not available elsewhere in the undisputed Pauline corpus. Second, more natural Greek expressions are available to express apposition, e.g., οἵτινές εἰσιν, “who are,” or τοῦτέστιν, “which is.” Third, when the preposition “upon” (ἐπὶ) is repeated, the second instance normally distinguishes a *second* group from those serving as the object of the first instance of the preposition. In Mt 27:25, for instance, the Jews call for the blood of Christ to be “upon” themselves and “upon” their children (ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν). Separate groups are in view: the Jewish adults on the one hand and their (future) children on the other. In Acts 5:11 “fear” not only came “upon” the whole church but also “upon *all* who heard of these things” (ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα), with “all” referring to people outside of the church. In Acts 11:15 the Holy Spirit came “upon” the gentiles as “upon” the Jews at the very beginning. In Heb 8:8 the “new covenant” “upon the house of Israel” stands juxtaposed with “upon the house of Judah.” Rev 20:4 refers to the mark “upon the foreheads” or “upon the hands.” In each of these examples the repeated “upon” (ἐπὶ) likely designates a second, separate group. Fourth, the awkward syntax with the second καί (καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ) draws attention to the last four words of the verse (τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ, “the Israel of God”) as a separate group from those “who will follow this rule.” Had Paul intended to convey that “the Israel of God” is the same group as those “who will follow this rule,” he would have omitted the unnecessary second καί (“also/even/namely”). “The Israel of God” is most likely a different group from the gentile Galatian Christians. Options 2 and 3 may have been too casually dismissed by the majority of interpreters. (CC)

## Option 2

Other interpreters have contended that the Greek wording of 6:15–16 (with the καί immediately preceding “upon the Israel of God”) distinguishes two separate groups of people and that the καί should be translated as “also” or “as well as”: “Peace and mercy be upon all who follow this rule as well as upon the Israel of God.” According to this view, as Paul contrasts his message of the cross of Jesus Christ with the message of his rivals, 6:11–16 closes on as fiercely polemical a note as the letter opens (1:6–9). Throughout the letter Paul condemns his rivals’ insistence (contrary to the “rule” [6:16] of 6:15) that circumcision is somehow necessary. This verse could be one last warning against the false brethren in the Galatians’ midst (cf. 1:8–9; 2:4–5). Those Jews who preach “another Gospel” of gentile Law observance are excluded from “the Israel of God” and from God’s blessings (1:6–9; 2:4–5). Paul may have begun his letter by invoking a curse upon the rivals (1:8–9); now his hope is that the rivals would experience God’s mercy at the judgment if they will simply abide by this “rule.” “The Israel of God” would be a redefined Israel consisting of those ethnic Jews who adhere to Paul’s Gospel of Jesus Christ and recognize the irrelevance of circumcision in the new creation.<sup>112</sup> Lest someone mistakenly draw the conclusion from the letter that Paul was abandoning any place for Israel in God’s plan, he offers a blessing for the ethnic Israel that is of God. Paul is not abandoning “we [who] are Jews by birth” who recognize the exclusive, saving

value of faith in/of Christ (2:15–16). While Jew and gentile are indeed united in Christ (3:28–29), Paul nevertheless recognizes that Peter must preach the one Gospel in a distinct mission to Jews as Jews, even as Paul must preach that Gospel message to the gentiles as gentiles (2:7–8). Advocates of option 1 have stressed the oneness of Jew and gentile in Christ (with 3:28). For advocates of option 2, even as oneness in Christ in 3:28 does not dissolve the distinction in roles between male and female, likewise the oneness in Christ of Jew and gentile does not deny differences in role and function for the Jews in God’s plan. In referring to the *true* Israel (“the Israel of God”), Paul is simultaneously commending the Jewish Christians who affirm his Gospel message and at the same time denigrating the Jewish-Christian rivals who demand circumcision as necessary for salvation. Option 2 fits the context of the letter as well with “the Israel of God” as ethnically Jewish Christ-believers who rely not on Moses’ Law but solely on the cross of Christ. (CC)

### Option 3

Advocates of option 3 likewise distinguish two separate groups but associate the blessing of “peace” with the first group (“them”) and “mercy” with the second group (“the Israel of God”): “And [καί] for as many who follow this rule, peace be upon them, and [καί] mercy even [καί] upon the Israel of God.” Favoring this translation, the first “and” (καί), the first “upon” (ἐπί), and the first attribute, “peace,” arguably remain separated from the second “and,” the second “upon,” and the second attribute, “mercy.” Jewish benedictions in that time period convey either “peace” or “mercy,” but not both.<sup>117</sup> A benediction of *both* “peace” and “mercy” would be unusual in Jewish circles. That problem is avoided if “peace” is for one group and “mercy” for another. Were “mercy” linked with “peace,” then “mercy” would likewise be conditional upon walking according to Paul’s “rule.” That would contradict how the apostle describes “mercy” elsewhere. “Mercy” is unconditional and never dependent upon human behavior or merit. God simply chooses to show mercy (Rom 9:15). In Rom 11:32 God is merciful to all the disobedient. “Mercy,” then, is not likely linked with the “peace” that is bestowed upon those following the “rule.” As “peace” is upon “them” (gentile Christians who rely on the cross rather than circumcision), “mercy” is upon a *separate* group, “the Israel of God.” On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of an Israel experiencing God’s “mercy” but not also “peace,” *shalom*. (CC)

### An Eschatological Interpretation: Ethnic Israel’s Future

In options 2 and 3 “the Israel of God” is a separate entity from the gentile Christians (“them”) walking according to Paul’s rule. Some take these two options a step further by pointing to the future tense of “will follow” (στοιχήσουσιν). If the tense has a truly future sense, perhaps the “mercy” (ἐλεος) for “the Israel of God” is likewise in the future. Perhaps Gal 6:16 should be interpreted like the ethnic “Israel” of Rom 11:26. Perhaps the apostle envisions that ethnic Israel as such will eventually be saved and enjoy God’s blessing. The problem is that Paul does not hint at that sort of future elsewhere in the letter to the Galatians. An automatic blessing of ethnic Israel would be at odds with the letter’s emphasis that circumcision does not matter. Circumcision, in that case, *would* matter since the gentiles do not enjoy the same automatic (future) salvation as the Jews. The apostle has been adamant throughout the letter that such is not the case!<sup>122</sup> The Gospel message to the circumcised remains the same cross-centered message that Paul is taking to the uncircumcised (2:7–9). The cross of Christ that dominates 6:11–18 continues to dominate this verse as well. Christ’s salvation is God’s exclusive means for all, whether Jew or gentile, to enjoy God’s blessing (3:27–29). (CC)

### Conclusion

All three interpretive options could conform to the larger context of the letter, whether option 1 with both blessings to the same group, option 2 with both blessings to separate groups, or option 3 with separate blessings to separate groups. Options 2 and 3 are significantly more likely than option 1. Whether or not

“the Israel of God” refers to a church inclusive of Jews and gentiles as in option 1, Paul’s language remains rhetorically potent. He defines God’s Israel in terms of those who adhere to his Gospel message. Having outlined the stark differences between his own view and that of his rivals, Paul wants the gentile Galatians to be clear on the choice that has been laid before them. Either God’s saving blessings come exclusively through the cross of Christ or through Moses’ Law. The paths are mutually exclusive, and the choice is now! For all who walk according to this “rule” there is blessing. (CC)

*Peace and mercy.* Cf. Ps 125:5; 128:6. (CSB)

And here is his blessing to them. This is a Jewish blessing. It's a beautiful blessing. And it's have liturgical and it shows you how he's bringing them back into the presence of God by means of his language. And they've been there all along. But he's bringing them back to a recognition that that's where they've been. And he's giving them a blessing. Peace on them and mercy. Peace on them and mercy. Those who walk according to the canon, the rule, the guide, of the new creation. Now, we've talked about peace. Peace is wholeness. It is health. It is wellness. It's relational integrity. It's having reconciliation with God. It is what we yearn for. (Just – V-44)

It is what we receive in the liturgy. The peace of God be with you. Go in peace. The Lord bless you, keep you, make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The last word you'll hear in the liturgy. Is the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Peace is what comes from heaven with the angels when Jesus is born. Peace is what happens when Jesus enters into Jerusalem. Peace on earth. Peace in heaven in Christ. That's the blessing that Paul is giving them. Peace on them and mercy. (Just – V-44)

Now, he doesn't use the word here grace. He uses mercy. Because that's what he's having on the Galatians. And that's what in fact Paul hopes that his opponents see as well as being the heart of the new creation. God's merciful miraculous healing of all that has been broken. Mercy is I think the No. 1 characteristic of Christians. Certainly it must be of pastors. And it is certainly what must be of deaconesses. Because it's at the heart of what it means to be baptized. Being merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. And those who walk along this canon of the new creation, peace on them and mercy. And then this is connected. And I think this is how I would translate it. (Just – V-44)

*this rule.* See vv. 14–15. (CSB)

Standard or principle, i.e., the one just mentioned: the cross and the new creation. (TLSB)

*Israel of God.* In contrast to “Israel according to flesh” (a literal rendering of the Greek for “people of Israel” in 1Co 10:18), the NT church, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles, is the new seed of Abraham and the heir according to the promise (3:29; cf. Ro 9:6; Php 3:3)—though some limit the phrase here to Christian Jews (translating the conjunction as “and” instead of “even”). (CSB)

All believers in Christ, both Jew and Gentile; the new Israel (cf v 10, “household of faith”). Paul has argued forcefully that Gentiles are children of Abraham, heirs of the promise (3:6–9, 21; 4:28–31). (TLSB)

That is on the Israel of God. It's not -- let's see how this translation -- for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God. I wouldn't translate that and there as and. These aren't two different things. Peace and mercy be upon them. That is anyone who walks according to the rule of the new creation. That is those people who have peace and mercy on them for living in the new creation, that is those people are now the Israel of God. The Israel of God, peace and mercy. Living in the new creation. All the same. (Just – V-44)

Now, think about what he's saying here. He is saying that these Gentiles from Galatia whom Christ died for on the cross, whom Christ showed his mercy and love for by spending out his life for them. They are now the Israel of God. Not because they are circumcised. Not because they kept the law. Simply because God's grace is upon them. They've been united with Christ in baptism. And they believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. (Just – V-44)

Again, I hope you see how shocking this would be for his Jewish Christian opponents. These Judaizers. These Pharisaical Christians. They are claiming: Wait a minute. We're the Israel. We have the marks of circumcision. And all the other things. And Paul is saying: No, no, no. Anyone who lives in the new creation in which there's neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, they are the ones upon whom God's blessing rests, peace and mercy. They are the Israel of God. (Just – V-44)

The new creation is what the Israel of God lives in. In the Christian church what you and I are a part of as we gather as the body of Christ around Word and sacrament, we are the new Israel. Founded on the 12 apostles as a cornerstone. Jesus Christ -- excuse me, as foundation stones. Jesus Christ being the cornerstone. The pillars being Peter, James and John and the four brothers of Jesus. We are that Israel. And it's not because we follow certain laws or because we have a certain heritage or because we're circumcised or because we have certain blood lines. It is simply because Jesus has engrafted himself into us by baptism in faith so that we have communion with him like the branches into the vine. And because he is our brother, God is our Father, and we are his children. We are sons. Sons of Jesus Christ. Sons of Abraham. (Just – V-44)

Now, all of that language is the language of Galatians that has been reverberating throughout this epistle. And now Paul names it Israel. New Israel. That is what the Galatians are. And Paul stands with them. And it's interesting he uses the language now here of Israel of God to include both himself as a Jew who has become a Christian by means of conversion to seeing Jesus as the Christ. And with these Gentile Galatians who were as far from the east as from the west from him until Christ came and redeemed them both. (Just – V-44)

This shows you what Paul means in Chapter 3 when he says: There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male and female. But we are all one in Jesus Christ. And if we skip forward here to the end, we are all one as the Israel of God in Christ. (Just – V-44)

**6:17** τοῦ λοιποῦ (“henceforth”)—Paul’s use of (τὸ) λοιπὸν tends to be logical, that is, in relation to the matter under discussion, i.e., “as far as the rest is concerned” (thus 1 Cor 1:16; 4:2; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 3:1; 4:8; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1). The problem is that this logical usage is always in the accusative case ([τὸ] λοιπὸν) and never the genitive (τοῦ λοιποῦ). The genitive usage in this verse suggests the temporal meaning “from now on” or “henceforth”: “henceforth” the rivals should not cause Paul any trouble. Marcion thought that τοῦ λοιποῦ was a partitive genitive, referring to part of a larger group *of persons*: let no one “of the rest” of Israel (i.e., the rival teachers) cause me trouble. This is a viable option but depends on the interpretation of “Israel” in 6:16. A weakness of Marcion’s translation is that τοῦ λοιποῦ here is singular, and Paul uses the singular τὸ λοιπὸν adverbially; the personal use of τὸ λοιπὸν is typically plural (e.g., οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι in Gal 2:13).

Ἰησοῦ (“of Jesus”)—This word is the reading in  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  A B C\* 33. The single word substitution Χριστοῦ (“of Christ”) is in P Ψ 81 <sup>cop</sup><sup>bo</sup>. The two-word expansion κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (“of the Lord Jesus”) is attested by K L Byzantine vg syr<sup>pesh</sup>. The longer three-word expression κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“of the Lord Jesus Christ”) is in  $\kappa$  it <sup>cop</sup><sup>sa</sup>. The longest variant, with four words, is κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

(“of our Lord Jesus Christ”), attested by D\* F G Ambrosiaster Pelagius. The variants reflect the influence of 6:18, which has the four words κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “our Lord Jesus Christ.” (CC)

*Henceforth let no one continue to cause me troubles, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus!* This final warning may seem anticlimactic after the rhetorically loaded reference to “the Israel of God” (6:16). Whereas the Greek word κόπος normally means “work” or “labor,” here its plural means “troubles.” The word was used in secular Greek for a beating or for a weariness that was the equivalent of having been beaten.<sup>125</sup> The secular usage gives a sense of the “trouble” Paul has in mind, and the present tense of the verb (παρεχέτω) suggests that the “troubles” are in progress or repeated. These troubles are a personal affront to Paul (“me,” μοι) and disturb the “peace” (εἰρήνη) to which Paul refers in 6:16. (CC)

Cicero, the great first-century BC orator, described a speech by Marcus Antonius, the grandfather of Mark Antony, in defense of Manius Aquilus, a former consul and retired general who was accused of extortion. At a dramatic and tearful moment in the speech, Marcus Antonius tore open the sorrowful, dejected Manius Aquilus’ garment to expose his scars from battle, proof of his dedication and loyalty to Rome (*De or.* 2.47.195–96). The rivals should not trouble Paul because he bears “the marks of Jesus” in his body. (CC)

“Marks” (στίγματα) in Gal 6:17 is a plural noun, which rules out that Paul is referring to a slave’s or criminal’s “brand” (which would be in the singular). Since the letter to the Galatians frequently mentions persecution, Paul is most likely referring to the scars and wounds he suffered because of his witness to the Gospel.<sup>130</sup> Paul does not say, “I have” these marks, but instead, “I bear” (βαστάζω) them. The Jewish historian Josephus narrated how Antipater reputedly had on nearly every part of his body the marks (σημεῖα, literally, “signs”) of his wounds for the sake of Caesar. In a similar fashion Paul bears the wounds of battle that attest his loyalty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (CC)

The further modifying of the “marks” as simply “of Jesus”—and not “of the Lord” or “of Christ”—may be intended to allude to the death of Jesus. In 2 Cor 4:8–9 Paul describes his apostolic sufferings: he is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. He has been beaten, lashed, flogged, and stoned (2 Cor 11:23–30). Thanks to these sufferings, he and his coworkers are “always carrying around the death of Jesus in the body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being betrayed to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10–11). Paul displays in his body the cross of Jesus (cf. Gal 3:1; 4:13). Note the emphatic “I” (ἐγὼ ... βαστάζω, literally, “I ... I bear”) as Paul continues to contrast himself with the trouble-makers. The marks of Jesus are vastly superior to the mark in which the rivals boast (6:12–13). Paul’s suffering serves as a vivid contrast to the rivals’ *avoidance* of suffering in 6:12 (cf. 5:11: preaching Christ led to persecution!). The Christ who suffered lives in and expresses himself through the apostle! (CC)

In a well-known ancient practice, people would dedicate themselves to a god in order to benefit from that god’s protection. They might wear a brand as devotees of the god or goddess. In the magical papyri from antiquity a man claims to be carrying (βαστάζω) the mummy of Osiris (as an amulet) and warns his opponents not to “cause [him] troubles” (κόπους παρέχω, the same vocabulary as in Gal 6:17). Like the mark on Cain in Gen 4:15 (cf. Ezek 9:4; Rev 7:2–4; 3 Macc 2:29–30), those who mess with Paul and his Gospel fall under a curse. The marks of Christ function as the equivalent of a talisman that warns of serious consequences. Paul is under the protection of his master. As the apostle writes in Gal 2:19–20: “I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (CC)

*no one cause me trouble* – Verse 17 he says: From now on do not let anybody trouble me. Now, I think you’ve got to see in this statement Paul is basically saying: Listen. I’ve had it. I’m the Apostle Paul. I have come here. I have preached the truth of the Gospel. You have strayed away from it. Some of you have listened to these opponents. Not all of you. But some of you have. They have abused, you



know, my position there as the founding pastor. They have taken you away from the Gospel. The truth of the Gospel has been compromised. He says: I've had it. From now on don't let anybody else bother me. Don't trouble me anymore. Get out of my face. I've had it. That's what he's saying. He is -- I don't want to say he's at his wits end. But I think he's reached the point where he has said everything he has to say. And he's just going to commend this to the Spirit now. Commend this to the Lord and his holy angels to take care of these Galatians so the truth of the Gospel might come out. But having said that, from now on don't let anybody trouble me, these are his final words. And this is why -- and if you look at the Greek, it's the first and last words. For I am bearing -- and had this language of bearing is important. I am bearing the stigmata, those are the marks, the scars, the marks of Jesus in my body. (Just – V-45)

*marks of Jesus.*† In ancient times the Greek word for “marks” was used of the brand that identified slaves or animals. Paul’s suffering (stoning, Ac 14:19; beatings, Ac 16:22; 2Co 11:25; illness, 2Co 12:7; Gal 4:13–14) marked him as a “servant of Christ” (1:10; cf. 2Co 4:10). Here, since Paul wrote Galatians shortly after the first journey (Ac 13–14), the reference must be to the stoning at Lystra (Ac 14:19), which left bruises on his body. (CSB)

Wounds and scars Paul received in the service of Jesus (Ac 14:19; 2Co 11:23–25). As a true apostle, Paul identified himself with the suffering Savior (cf 2Co 4:8–10; Php 3:10). (TLSB)

And this is what he's saying: The injuries that I have on my body were inflicted by the same powers that crucified Jesus. So my body is a testimony, flesh, my flesh, with its scars on it, with its stigmata, my body preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because if you look at my body, you will see a sign of the present activity of the redeemer. Not because of who I am. But because of what I've preached. I said before: I will boast in nothing but Christ crucified. I will preach Christ crucified. For preaching that I have been stoned. I have been whipped. I have been scourged. I have been beaten to the point of death. And those marks that I now bear in my body are a sign of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because I have suffered with my Lord. I have been in a sense co-crucified with him in baptism. And that has led to this suffering. (Just – V-45)

Now, I don't know about you. But I think that's a profound way to end this epistle. Because Paul has shown throughout this epistle that it is really in many ways about how he as an apostle to the Gentiles bears in his own body, his speaking, his character, his own sufferings, he has borne the Gospel to them. And they loved him so much they were willing to take out their eyes and give them to him. Now, that's an extraordinary act of love. And Paul is appealing now had in his final words to them that his bearing in his body these stigmata of Jesus is a sign that he is the true apostle who speaks the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel of a crucified Christ. (Just – V-45)

**6:18** ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”)—Some witnesses omit ἡμῶν (“our”): 1241 69 8<sup>s</sup> 1739 1881 2464. In favor of the pronoun ἡμῶν (“our”) are ℣<sup>46</sup> A B C D F G K L Ψ 33 88 104 131 1734, among others.

μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν (“be with your spirit”)—As in 6:16, Paul assumes that the audience will supply the optative form of the verb εἰμί, “is,” namely, “be.” See the second textual note on 6:16.

ἀμήν—After the “amen,” πρὸς Γαλάτας (“to the Galatians”) is added as a *subscriptio* in 8 A B\* C (D F G) Ψ 33. The longer *subscriptio* in B<sup>1</sup> and the Majority text is πρὸς Γαλάτας ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ῥώμης, “It [the epistle] was written to the Galatians from Rome,” or perhaps “ ‘To the Galatians’ [the epistle] was written from Rome.” These are, in all likelihood, later scribal additions that clarify the addressees and circumstances behind the letter. (CC)

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers (and sisters). Amen.* Paul closes the letter with a benediction. “Grace” is a key term from the beginning of the letter (1:3). The Galatians were called

by God's "grace" (1:6) even as Paul was called by God's "grace" and granted "grace" for his ministry (1:15; 2:9). God "has graciously given" Abraham an inheritance through the promise (κεχάρισται, 3:18). How fitting that Paul should bless the Galatians with nothing other than God's unmerited grace! Nothing more is required of them to enjoy God's favor. Whereas Paul normally opens his letters as he does Galatians with a note of "grace ... and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), here the "grace" is simply that of "our Lord Jesus Christ." The focus remains on Jesus because his saving work has been jeopardized by the rivals' teaching. (CC)

Paul prays that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ might be "with your [the Galatians'] spirit" (μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν; so also Phil 4:23; Philemon 25; and 2 Tim 4:22 with the singular σοῦ, "you"). Paul chooses to close with this phrase instead of just "with you" (μεθ' ὑμῶν, Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 16:23; Col 4:18; 1 Thess 5:28; 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22) or "with you all" (μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, 1 Cor 16:24; 2 Cor 13:13 [ET 13:14]; 2 Thess 3:16, 18; Titus 3:15). Although "spirit" (πνεύματος) is singular and "your" (ὑμῶν) is plural, one should not read too much into this fact. Paul simply prefers the distributive singular for what belongs to each person in a group.<sup>141</sup> This may be the only verse in Galatians in which Paul uses πνεῦμα to refer to the human "spirit" rather than God's "Spirit." Why would the letter to the Galatians, along with the letters to the Philippians (4:23) and to Philemon (25), close with a prayer that the "grace" of the Lord Jesus Christ might be with the recipients' "spirit" (see also the similar benediction in 2 Tim 4:22)? Fee has observed that Philippians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy are the most overtly affectionate Pauline letters. Perhaps "with your spirit" just before "brothers (and sisters)" (ἀδελφοί) serves as a closing offer of affection after the tension and distress of the letter's content. Paul does not call his recipients "brothers (and sisters)" in any of his other epistolary farewells with the exception of Eph 6:23. This fraternal appellation is a last reminder that the Galatians belong to "the household of faith" (6:10; see also 1:2). They are all family to each other! They share the same Lord, "our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:18, as in 6:14). May the Galatians hear this letter as an expression of a fellow family member concerned out of love for their well-being. (CC)

"Amen"—"may it be so!" Paul ends where he began (1:1) by invoking God, that God's will may be done. The apostle's fervent hope is that the Galatians would join in his prayer and that there might be, by God's sheer "grace" (6:18), a positive outcome to the situation in Galatia. Paul would have *all* his hearers join in this prayer for their spiritual well-being, that is, for *our* spiritual well-being. (CC)

*with your spirit.* Not the Holy Spirit, but simply an expression meaning "with you." (TLSB)

*brothers.* The last word of the Epistle is this kind greeting. (TLSB)

*Amen.* A word of confirmation often used at the close of a doxology or benediction. (CSB)

This is Paul's final farewell. He ends the epistle with the same words with which he began it, as though he were saying: "I have proclaimed Christ to you purely. I have begged you and scolded you. I have not omitted anything that I thought you needed. There is nothing further that I can do for you except to pray from my heart that our Lord Jesus Christ may add His blessing and His increase to my labor, and may rule you by His Spirit forever. Amen." (Luther)

**6:11–18** In a handwritten postscript, Paul leaves us with an interpretive lens through which to evaluate all Christian teaching and life: the message of the cross. Against all self-righteous pride in spiritual accomplishments, the cross speaks a word of judgment. Yet to those who believe, the cross is God's power to make all things new. • Lord, in Baptism, You put my old nature to death. By Your grace, dear Lord Jesus, continue to renew me. I already am a new creation in You. Amen. (TLSB)