

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for July 12: Be responsible**

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God, through the Holy Spirit, holds every believer responsible and accountable for every aspect of a person's faith and works. Holy living is expected by our Father who is holy, righteous and just. Faith to receive the grace of God begins the journey of life lived in the Spirit. Because of the influence and guidance of the Spirit, law is not the primary guidance. The Holy Spirit establishes values and character natural to the redeemed person and are lived out, in any culture and context, through love.

The Apostle Paul clearly contrasted life in the Spirit and life in the flesh. The carnal nature is powerful enough to destroy the individual and bring eternal death (Galatians 5:19-21) while life in the Spirit produces noble values and character, concluding in eternal life (vv. 22-25).

The quality of the Spirit-filled life is contingent upon how much God's Spirit is in control, at any given time. Christians who are full of the Holy Spirit often find themselves leaking and deflated by giving in to the persuasion and temptation to sin.

Paul adds to the glorious life of being in the Spirit by defining some of the practical ways these values can and should occur when one walks in the Spirit. Likely, Paul used examples that related directly to the Galatians fellowship.

Congregations of today most often have factious issues, sin issues and ministry-neglect issues that present constant attention. The Galatians, obviously, were no different. Churches always are hospitals for sinners.

Responsibility is necessary for free grace to have essential and consequential meaning.

### **Be responsible to restore the sinful (Galatians 6:1)**

Restoration is a major ministry of Christian love. Those “caught in a sin” (any wrongdoing) should gently be restored. Maintaining individual and church purity is a constant challenge.

A layman friend of mine called from out of state to seek advice. There was a lady in his church who became pregnant out of wedlock. The pastor went to her and demanded she not come back unless she confessed her sin to the church. My friend, in contrast, was concerned about how the church could minister to her and use this occasion to restore her and how difficult that would be if she was not welcomed.

Issues of this nature are around most every Sunday with lots of different advice, biblical instruction (some that seem conflicting—“let him without sin cast the first stone”), unknown information about circumstances, psychological stability of the individual, and which action would most likely bring restoration and perhaps salvation.

Complicated as it is, restoration is to be the primary aim. Saving face, keeping the reputation of the congregation, and standing firm on moral issues mean a gentle approach is necessary and effective. Each situation should be handled individually and with gentleness. A “one-answer” approach often will bring reproach on the individual as well as the church. All personality types involved in solutions can benefit greatly from Paul’s words, “restore him gently.”

Those who take on the responsibility of restoration should be extremely careful to “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Many well-meaning ministers who preached moral integrity have learned this lesson

the hard way, not to mention the army of Christians who have fallen to temptation and brought shame to the name of Christ. The Holy Spirit persuades and guides toward scriptural integrity and obedience but will give in to the free choice of individuals who yield to temptation.

In the process of restoration, there is no place for prideful indignation, judgmental attitudes or arrogant piousness. Christians can have high expectations with the worse sort of attitude and behavior. Church people, sometimes, love to kill their wounded while others forgive too easily and without toughness. Both of these extremes tend to be self-defeating and non-productive.

A good approach is not to condone or condemn but restore in love. Reality clearly testifies that good people do sin and every opportunity for regeneration, repentance and restoration should be exercised.

Divisiveness in church often is a product of conceit, envy, pettiness, irresponsibility, comparisons and selfishness (Galatians 5:26; 6:3-5). Satan knows where the weaknesses are and who can be tempted. One must “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25) in order to avoid conflict, waste of time, hurtful words, mistrust, anger and withdrawal.

### **Be responsible to carry other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2-6)**

From the sin problem, Paul brings up another issue of love, the issue of burden bearing. How should the Christian respond to the problems which inevitably come to friends, neighbors, enemies and church members? Each Christian, with “faith expressing itself in love” (Galatians 5:6), is to help others shoulder their burdens by getting under the load, and “in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

What law? The law of love: “love your neighbor as yourself.” Love is not just for selected neighbors but whoever has need of help and encouragement. Burdens can be extremely heavy and come frequently in

torrents, like swatting bees. Burdens of guilt, loneliness, poverty, health, broken relationships, shattered dreams, unrequited love, hopelessness, addictions, failures, disappointments, rejection, joblessness and numerous other ones bring depression, despair and frustration. Love helps lift and carry the load of others.

Paul is wise enough to offer a counter point by saying, “for each one should carry his own load” (v. 5). Don’t dump on others what you should be able to carry yourself if you live in the Spirit. Those who can help carry the burdens of others usually are those healthy souls who know how to bear up under their own load. God’s people should be stronger than most, healthier in times of troubles so that burdens become stepping stones to spiritual maturity and a vital faith. A mutual strength and helpfulness toward each other in love should mark any congregation of faith (see Galatians 4:16 for an example of how the Galatians had helped Paul bear his burden). The congregational characteristic of sharing of burdens is one of the most loving testimonies of the work of God in the human heart.

Regarding getting involved in the suffering of others, God’s people can be about as selfish as anyone. Christians often would rather fuss about their failures, gossip about their gloom and murder them with their minds rather than minister to others in their misery.

“Carry” is an imperative and references a load or weight of action rather than a feeling of sympathy. “Carry” is the same word (John 19:17) used of Jesus as he carried or bore his cross to the place of crucifixion.

Christians are wounded healers who offer personal experiences of healing and helping hands as a testimony to Christ’s love.

### **Be responsible to share with your instructors (Galatians 6:6)**

Motivated by the Holy Spirit, believers are responsible to support those

who teach and preach. This brief statement, more than a parenthesis, is but another example of mutual sharing of the church: share in restoration, share in each other's burdens, and share in appreciation of one's teachers. To receive instructions and learn from God's word, one "must share all good things with his instructor" (v. 6).

Financial support is the most likely intent. However, the 'good things' shared also may include such things as prayer, joys, blessings, achievements, encouragement and successes. Teachers who provide helpful knowledge should be provided for and not to do so is harsh, neglectful and disrespectful.

Teaching and preaching are exceedingly significant to the life of a congregation. Those called to ministry should have the financial support of other Christians. The worthy teacher is worthy of all different kinds of support, including appreciation, kindness, attention and love. Giving to enhance the lives of others, including one's teacher, is a responsible expression of love.

### **Be responsible for the management of your life (Galatians 6:7-10)**

The Christian is free and responsible for the management of his life. Accountability flows out of the principle of harvest: the seeds you plant will produce identical fruit. Sowing to please the sinful nature will reap destruction and eternal death. Sowing to please the Spirit, "from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (v. 8).

The responsibility of management of your life has two levels. First, accountability is to receive Christ and be led by the Spirit. Second, and once led by the Spirit, one is accountable for his works. You cannot plant evil and reap good, stinginess and reap generosity, pettiness and reap priorities, immorality and reap morality, discord and reap cooperation, hatefulness and reap respect.

In addition, the product of what one sows is multiplied many times over, often from one generation to the next. God has built into sin its own destruction, attendant to his eternal judgment. God is the judge, and one cannot mock him. The principle cannot be commandeered or changed. What we are will produce what we are, positively or negatively.

Therefore, in spite of the cost in terms of energy, money, time and talent, do not “become weary of doing good” for ultimately a rewarding harvest will be forthcoming (v. 9). Often, the harvest of good works is reaped long after one’s life is over. The emphasis is on the harvest, but there will be no harvest unless the seeds are planted. One does not get up in the morning and say, “I am going to plant some seeds from my life today,” for the seeds are planted every day whether we intend to or not.

Ministry is very demanding and requires deliberate and intentional focus. Our ministry is to the “family of believers” but also “to all men” (v. 10). Living in the flesh is but selfishness amplified while living in and by the Spirit is love amplified toward others.

The harsh reality is that 20 percent of Christians do 80 percent of the work and burn-out happens frequently. People take on more than they should. Even if one has to slow down for a period, one should look forward to putting the harness back on to continue to do good.

Even Jesus withdrew to the mountains to regroup from mental and physical exhaustion. Our Lord did not do everything he might have, but he did do some things. People are to wear out, not burn out or rust out. From one of my mentors in ministry, I learned this truth: “Defeated, ‘Yes,’ but discouraged, ‘Never.’” Exhaustion and discouragement can lead to walking away from ministry to others. Pace yourself and do not quit.

### **Be responsible with your motives (Galatians 6:11-15)**

Paul inserts a brief personal note to authenticate his letter. Using a

secretary, he dictated his letter to the churches of Galatia. Paul takes the pen in hand to complete his manuscript. The “large letters” of his own handwriting (5:11) may complement Paul’s earlier remark that “you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me” (4:12-15). Paul’s may have had partial blindness, either temporary or permanent, though we cannot know for sure. This may be the same or different from his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Under his own hand, he concludes the letter with an appeal to steadfastness and criticism of irresponsibility and cowardice.

Without mincing words, he accuses the brothers of accepting circumcision “to avoid being persecuted” (6:12). Furthermore, those circumcised troublemakers, who insist on others obeying the Jewish law of circumcision, did not and could not obey all of the law themselves. Successfully recruiting believers to be circumcised provided opportunity for the opposition to boast of the numbers returning to the laws of their Jewish traditions.

Boasting about the number of circumcisions may not be any different than boasting of the number of baptisms. Most every minister of the gospel, with ministerial conceit, has been tempted to boast of conversions. Paul refused to go there saying, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). The point of the letter of Galatians is clear: “What counts is a new creation” (v. 15). He blesses with “peace and mercy to all who follow this rule” (v. 16).

## **Conclusion**

Believers can be very irresponsible. At various times and levels of commitment, the battle between the temptation of the flesh and the guidance of the Spirit can be very intense. I think it can be accurately concluded that most Christians do not grasp how to live in the Spirit’s guidance. Great difficulty exists in being able to see and understand one’s

self. It is so convenient to follow the way of the church, adopt its level of maturity, conform to the traditions, transfer to a lower vision, and think without looking beyond the closed windows of tradition.

Being responsible is an individual endeavor before it becomes a corporate one. We tend to speak of the expectations and responsibilities of the church rather than God's expectation of the individual believer. God does not exempt any believer from the basic elements of godliness, purity, morality, benevolence, witnessing, mercy, hospitality and generosity. After all, through faith, bringing someone into the family of God demands our best in all matters of the Christian life.

An individual's self-control in any society, free or otherwise, is by consent, consent that says, "Yes," to either carnal indulgence or constraint by love. Even submission to coercion is by consent. Ask any martyr.