

SPIRITUAL OR UNSPIRITUAL? Galatians 6:1-5

There was a man named Ezra that God used to lead a spiritual revival in Israel after their return from the Babylonian exile (Nehemiah 8). And the reason God used him is because he was a man of the Word. Ezra 7:10 says, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” He set his heart, he made up his mind – number one, **to study** the law of the Lord, but secondly, **to practice it**. And only when you do those two, can you rightfully do the third, which is **teach it**. We study the Word, we practice it and then we teach it. But notice that Ezra wasn’t pleased and neither would the Lord be, if he only studied it and taught it. **It must be practiced**. James 1:21 says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves,” and if any man be “an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” At the very beginning of Revelation, 1:3, it says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Blessing comes not just to those who read it but who actually hear it and give heed to it. They allow it to change them. In Matthew 7, Jesus said, “**Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?** So we are not only to be professors, professing to know Him, but to show it by actually doing what He says. I guess several passages could be cited for this idea I’m trying to relay that we are to be doers and not merely hearers, people who practice and don’t merely study and teach.

When I say this, I’m not elevating practice above doctrine. The day in which we live I think puts so much emphasis on practical that it forgets the doctrinal. But our practice comes from and is based on our doctrine. If we’re not serious about doctrine, our practice won’t be what it should be. You have to have sound doctrine for sound practice. That’s why Galatians is written in the order that it is. We’re learning what it looks like to live out the doctrine we just studied and living it out is important too. As one man said, it’s one thing to believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, but quite another to put yourself under the authority of them. And I’ll say it’s one thing to go through the book of Galatians and heartily agree with it; it’s quite another to actually do what it says. We haven’t gone through this book just to study it. We’ve done it to apply it to our lives – to have our minds renewed and set free through the truth but then for the transformation of our lives as we learn to live in that freedom. So what does it look like for us, as for Ezra, to practice what we’ve studied in Galatians? What does it look like to be a doer and take heed to the things we’ve heard in Galatians? **Well as we open up chapter 6 now, Paul gives us a hypothetical, but common church situation to explain to us what the difference should look like. The hypothetical situation is that of an erring brother or sister, someone caught up in sin, and the difference between law and grace is being revealed by the differences in how a flesh-led Judaizer would handle the situation and a Spirit-led grace-believer would handle it.** And it is quite a revealing contrast. One is considered spiritual and the other not. **Let’s read our text: Galatians 6:1-5.**

As we’ve gone through the book of Galatians, we’ve done a lot of necessary contrasting and separating, because the false teaching Judaizers had done a lot of mixing and stirring together. The Judaizers tried to mix the Law of Moses with the Abrahamic Promise, mix Law with Grace and mix works with faith but Paul has been busy contrasting them and separating them because works will never be the basis of our justification. The Law brings curse, while the Promise brings blessing; the Law was conditional, while the Promise was unconditional; the Law was bilateral and required mediators, but the Promise was unilateral, up to God alone to keep it; the Law is inferior, the Promise superior; the Law brought bondage, but faith in Christ sets people free. The Law was a tutor that taught elementary principles to slaves, but those in Christ

are mature adults and free heirs now. The Law is like the bondwoman Hagar with Ishmael, but the Promise is like freewoman Sarah with Isaac. To live by Law is to live by the desires and passions of the flesh but to live by grace through faith in Christ is to walk by the Spirit. We've done a lot of contrasting. And we spent a lot of time looking at the evidence of whether or not we are walking by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit – we know by whether or not we bear the fruit of the Spirit. And now, to demonstrate the difference even further, Paul even gives us this hypothetical situation of an erring brother or sister to magnify the differences between those led by the fleshly legalism and those led by the Spirit and grace. And this is brilliant because when you think about it, as Wiersbe said, **“Nothing reveals the wickedness of legalism better than the way the legalists treat those who have sinned.”**¹ If you're deceived by some sin unknowingly or weighed down by some sin and caught in it, struggling to get out of it, who do you want to come and help? The proud and arrogant Judaizer or the Spirit-led believer who really cares for you? Paul here, considers one unspiritual and one spiritual. This example really shows us what it looks like to put into practice and be a doer of Galatians in this situation. And **what I want to do to help bring clarity is to cross-examine the two: the unspiritual response and the spiritual response.** We'll look at the unspiritual first, so that we can end on a positive note and plus it naturally follows my main supporting text which we'll get too.

I. CROSS-EXAMINING THE UNSPIRITUAL RESPONSE.

Verse 1 says, **“If anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”** So again we have a believer caught living in sin or some type of moral failure. They're missing the mark somewhere, but definitely a believer. You can't expect someone without Christ to live like a Christian (1 Cor. 5:9-13). It does not necessarily have to be someone who is willfully living in sin rebelliously but is caught or has been snared through sin's deceit. Hebrews 3:13 calls it **“the deceitfulness of sin”**. They might not see their sin yet or haven't been confronted yet. Sometimes it takes another person to gently point out our own error we don't notice in ourselves. There is a big difference between someone who is clearly living in disobedience against God and someone who is known for walking by the Spirit but has a slip-up or lapse in judgment – and that's possible for even the most godly and the one who is spiritual and is obliged to address the situation is to do so with gentleness (meekness). The word **“caught”** carries the idea of being overtaken by surprise or caught off guard, which is exactly how a trap works and how sin often works. No one and no animal intentionally walk through a trap like a snare, knowing what it is and what it will do. Sin is often the same way; the way that seems right to a man but in the end leads to death (Prov. 14:12). Sometimes it sneaks up on us or we drift into it without thinking like Peter did in chapter 2 and Paul had to confront him face to face. Snares are highly effective traps for trapping fur because being made of wire, they're hard to see and easy to cover up or conceal. Whatever the person is caught in is like a snare and wasn't intentional, kind of like how these smooth talking Judaizers had successfully snared the Galatians and Paul is the one who is spiritual and trying to set them free. He's working to restore these believers. So that's our context and what I want to do now is look at 4 characteristics of the unspiritual Judaizer as he responds to this sensitive situation.

A. Unspiritual Characteristic #1 – They are harsh. (v. 1)

They're not gentle or sensitive and don't empathize with people. The only thing they are sensitive of is the sin in other peoples' lives and their need to tell everyone about it. If they attempt to restore them at all, they will often be cold and condemning and shaming. They'll use harsh words and comments and glares. The Judaizer tends to kick people while they're down instead of offering them a hand. They tend to push people even further away.

B. Unspiritual Characteristic #2 – They are not humble. (vv. 1, 3)

They think they're a cut above the rest and beyond failure like the one who has been trapped. They look down their noses at them and find a weird sense of pleasure in seeing their brother fall because it makes them look good. Like verse 3 says, they really think they're something, but Paul says they're nothing and are deceiving themselves. They're self-righteous. But we know that pride comes before the fall (Prov. 16:18). Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall (1 Cor. 10:12). Unspiritual people are proud, not humble.

C. Unspiritual Characteristic #3 – They're too good to stop and help others. (v. 2)

They wouldn't truly bear others' burdens unless it benefited them. The Judaizer's motto is: I'll scratch your back IF you scratch mine. They don't really love people. They want others to serve them, not serve others. They want to be first. The only other reason a Judaizer would stop when someone is hurting is to shame them and say, "I told you so," or maybe stop to pick up a rock and throw it at them. If I could sum up all of the points about what this passage reveals about the unspiritual, I would say this:

❖ **The unspiritual like to throw rocks.**

They're a self-righteous, Pharisaical Judaizer. I mean when Paul wrote this it's almost like he had a real situation in mind and not just a hypothetical one. While I was studying this passage, I was bound by how what Paul is talking about here coincides almost perfectly with the familiar story we have been given by the gospel of John with the woman caught in adultery. John chapter 8:2-11 if you'll turn there with me. And this woman was caught in sin, kind of like our passage. It was trap put on by the Pharisees. Every time I read I wonder where the guy is who sinned too. He's pry standing right there watching with a stone in his hand.

“Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court [where everyone would see] they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?’ [I don’t know about you but I always picture them as already holding stones in their hands like you see in some of the movies] They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground [Don’t you wonder what He was writing? It’s one my questions for eternity]. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’

He's revealing to them what they didn't understand about the Law, just like Paul with the Judaizers – its purpose is to reveal sin, not to be used to construct your own self-righteousness. They saw sin in everyone else but they couldn't see the sin in themselves. They were being hypocritical. That's characteristic #4.

D. Unspiritual Characteristic #4 – They fail to examine themselves properly. (vv. 4-5)

They're so busy criticizing others that they fail to examine themselves properly. One of the purposes of communion is to stop and examine ourselves and our own walk with God but these guys couldn't didn't do that, like the Pharisee who thanked God that he wasn't like the tax-collector. “I thank God that I’m not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get” (Lk. 18:11). Even his prayer is evil. He prays his pride. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world,

so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see [or think they see] may become blind.” Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, ‘We are not blind too, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains” (Jn. 9:39-41). Because you say you have no sin, your sin remains. The first step in coming to Christ is to admit you’re a sinner and after we come to Christ, we never stop admitting that.

We will come back to John 8 but let’s switch gears now and look at the ‘you who are spiritual’.

II. **CROSS-EXAMINING THE SPIRITUAL RESPONSE.**

Paul says here you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of or manner of meekness. When he says ‘you who are spiritual’ he’s not referring to a specific person or group within the church but saying hypothetically again, **if there’s anyone spiritual among you or anyone who considers themselves spiritual or wants to be spiritual, this is how they will respond to this kind of situation when it comes up.** This is what it looks like to walk by the Spirit in this situation. He will not be like the Judaizer, who thinks he’s spiritual but isn’t. He really will be spiritual because he’s walking by the Spirit, dealing with others the same way God deals with them: IN GRACE.

A. **Spiritual Characteristic #1 – They seek to restore the wayward in a spirit of gentleness. (v. 1)**

A spiritual person is gentle and merciful and forgiving with others because God has been those things to them in Christ. They don’t want the situation to get to the point of church discipline. They don’t want to throw rocks at them. They really care about them and love them. This word restore is a neat word. Many commentators pointed out that it means “**to mend**” like mending a fishing net and repairing it (Mt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19) or “**to set**” like setting a bone that has been broken or a putting a limb back in joint [**NET MENDING SLIDE**] or to be made whole and complete and useful. We want people to be mended, to be put back together and made whole and functioning again properly. Hebrews 12:12-13 says, “**Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, a make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.**” Sometimes people lapse or lose sight of what’s important in this race of the Christian life. They get weary and grow tired and begin to backslide as they lose sight of what is important and what is eternal and what really matters. Paul says, “**Strengthen them! Help them back up on their feet! Lift the drooping hands, strengthen the weak kness.**” Put away sluggishness. Excel still more (1 Thess. 4:10)! Don’t let a root of bitterness or godless person like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal and afterwards when he desired to inherit the blessing was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears (Heb. 12:15-17). Don’t let anyone fall asleep in the Christian life and drift out of their lane [**CHARIOT WHEEL TRACKS**]! Make straight paths. Think about how the wheel tracks of your life are leaving an eternal impression like these cart tracks in the Mediterranean or a sandhills trail road. Wherever we go consistently, we’re leaving a mark and that has an effect on those who are supposed to be following our tracks. We want to work to restore those who have gotten off track. The spiritual understands this and genuinely want to help people throw off the sin and the weight that so easily entangles and help them run with endurance. They want to see them mended and made complete again, useful for the Lord. Some of you probably have friends and family members coming to mind who need some mending or put back in the straight track.

B. Spiritual Characteristic #2 – They humbly realize they too can fail. (vv. 1-3)

Spiritual people don't think themselves as spiritually superior or perfect to the one who has blown it, nor immune to the same failure. And don't overlook Paul's underlying doctrinal thought on sanctification in this passage because it's important. He just got done saying that those who habitually practice the deeds of the flesh won't inherit the kingdom of God but that doesn't mean he's preaching some sort of perfectionism or that those who are spiritual will ever reach a point where they no longer battle the sin nature or that the sin nature is eradicated. We clearly have this war between the flesh and the Spirit until the day we die or are raptured. Even the spiritual person here and the most godly can slip up. Paul says the spiritual will be looking closely at himself, watching himself, that he himself does not get entangled in the sin of the person he is attempting to restore to fellowship. All of us need to be careful when we go to help others that we ourselves don't fall into the same sin because let's be honest, people can be very persuasive and can think of many excuses to justify their sin. Or we might not be tempted to sin in the same way they do but we might be tempted to anger or gossip, especially if they don't respond to rightly.

C. Spiritual Characteristic #3 – They bear others' burdens, fulfilling the Law of Christ. (v. 2)

Those who are spiritual have a sacrificial type of love for people that's willing to put effort into seeing their brother or sister restored. They're will to help bear the burden and fulfill the Law of Christ. I think the Law of Christ he's referring to is Christ's law of love. It's something the apostle John really gravitated towards and emphasized. John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." It's this sacrificial, self-giving, Christ-like love that is the new Love Law (1 John 2:7-11). 1 John 3:23-24, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." 1 John 2:10-11, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." If we love our brother, we're going to help them bear their burden. A burden is something that is weighing someone down and to help them bear it is a form of love.² What I've found neat is all the present tense imperative verbs in this passage. While we keep on looking to ourselves, we keep on restoring, keep on bearing one another's burdens. It's to be a continual practice of ours. We're continually lifting people up, holding them up and building them up. "Bringing back into the fellowship of Christ a brother or sister who has strayed will often mean entering into their lives with empathy and a concern to take on ourselves what of their own sorrows and difficulties we can."³ We listen, pray, share, be an accountability partner and just do what we can.

D. Spiritual Characteristic #4 – They accept responsibility for their own spiritual walk, examining themselves without comparing. (v. 3-5)

Verses 3-5 really focus on the spiritual person's understanding of their need to examine themselves properly and quit comparing themselves with others. Comparisons are carnal, unless you're comparing yourself to Christ. The apostle is saying take an honest look at yourself and quit comparing yourself with others. The word "load" (phortion) is a different word than "burden" (bare)(even though some translations translate them the same). There's

a change of reference taking place with two different words. We're no longer talking about a burdening sin but one's personal Christian work-load. It's not something unbearable but like a shoulder pack that someone actually can carry and is likely referring to all that a believer does.⁴ So **for one**, we all have our own loads to carry. God assigns each of us different spheres of influence with different gifts and resources. And spiritual people will help others with theirs but at the same time, understand and accept that ultimately the one held responsible at the judgment seat for their load is them. In other words, I'm responsible for me. You're responsible for you. It's up to me to put myself in a position where I can grow spiritually and walk by the Spirit but at the same time know that if we accomplish anything for God, we boast in Him because we know we're products of God's grace and it is Him at work in us and through us. If we boast in anything, we boast in the cross of Christ (6:14). Grace allows us to properly assess ourselves like that. And **that sort of honest self-assessment is required for helping others** isn't it? Jesus said you need to take the log out of your own eye before you can rightly take the sliver out of your brother's eye (Mt. 7:5). That's what He got these Pharisees to focus on in John 8, the log in their eye.

The Pharisees and scribes stood around this woman ready to stone her and Jesus says, **“He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they began to go out one by one [I imagine them dropping their stones before they do], beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, **“Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”** She said, **“No one, Lord.”** And Jesus said, **“I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”**

Jesus is the Master again. He shows the Pharisees their error and works for their spiritual benefit and at the same time lifts up the woman while making her deal honestly with her sin – He's firm but gentle. What a wise God. What a good example of what Paul is teaching here. He's the epitome of being spiritual. He not only restored the woman caught in adultery but several others: He lifted up Peter after his failure, the woman at the well, Zacchaeus... imagine how many others He touched to bring about spiritual restoration that weren't written. To be a spiritual restorer is Christ-like, is spiritual. To bear one-another's burdens is a Christ-like, divine quality.⁵ Like always, the cross is the greatest demonstration. Christ is our Burden-Bearer. He bore the burden of our sin on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says, **“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; For by His wounds we were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”**

Lord, we thank you for being our sin-bearer, bearing our greatest burden. I pray that this text from your word would settle into our hearts and not be forgotten, that we would always remember to be burden bearers like you, especially to those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and to examine ourselves properly without comparing. May this church be a church free from the false spirituality of legalism and truly spiritual, walking by the Spirit. If anyone here today has that sort of burden and needs help, I pray they find the accountability partner they need to help them through it, someone truly spiritual. May we all be truly spiritual like You.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 577.

² Douglas J. Moo, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 377.

³ Ibid, .

⁴ Ibid, 379.

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) 260.