

Spirit-Enabled Love
Galatians 6.1-15
October 14

No one can separate Christian life and doctrine. The doctrines of the Christian faith radically affect the manner in which a believer lives life. A failure in doctrine inevitably shows up in lifestyle. A failure in lifestyle inevitably goes back to incorrect doctrine. Nowhere in the New Testament does God more show the inseparableness of doctrinal belief and lifestyle than the book of Galatians.

According to the Apostle Paul, people live either "in the flesh" or "in the Spirit." A life lived in the sphere of the "flesh" attempts to earn salvation (Gal. 3:1-3) and produces patterns of life destructive to the individual and community (Gal. 5:19-21). In contrast, a life lived in the sphere of the "Spirit" (live, walk, keep in step with the Spirit), produces patterns of life beneficial to the individual and community (Gal. 5:22-23).

Utilizing a simple juxtaposition, Paul demonstrated the outcome of the "flesh" and "Spirit." The "flesh" results in conceit, provocation, and envy (Gal. 5:25). The "Spirit" results in a life of love. In Galatians 6, Paul beautifully sketches some aspects of the Spirit love of a Christian. What characterized Spirit-prompted love?

First, loving in the sphere of the Spirit means Christians restore wayward brothers and sisters (Gal. 6:1). Fleshly people are too busy with self, negatively judge, affirm that this is not their business, and prefer to gossip about a sinful family member.

Paul outlined four truths about his situation. First, Paul discussed the case—either a Christian or a non-Christian detects a fellow believer in a grievous, grave sin—the act of willful transgression of God's will. The unloving action is to do nothing to help. Second, Paul highlighted those with particular responsibilities—the spiritual. By this term, Paul described Christians walking, living, and keeping step with the Spirit. Third, Paul detailed the manner in which a Christian ministers—with gentleness and self-examination. Finally, Paul described the goal—the restoration of the believer to a life of faithfulness. The New Testament used the verb "restore" to describe the mending of a net or the setting of a bone. Discipline aims to reset a fallen family member on the correct path.

Second, loving in the sphere of the Spirit prompts concern for brothers and sisters carrying a crushing burden (Gal. 6:2-5). An individual living in the sphere of the flesh lives under the deception of being self-sufficiency. Paul continually set forth the mutuality of the Christian life. We need each other. The term for burden described a crushing weight carried some distance. Family members demonstrate life in the Spirit by providing assistance to help lighten the load. Paul did not contradict himself regarding burden-bearing in Galatians 6:5. Each person is responsible for carrying his or her own backpack, not the crushing weight of Galatians 6:2.

Further, the verb "carry" is a future tense load. Paul reminded proud, fleshly individuals that they would bear their own weight in the future day of judgment. Now, God commands Christians to come to the aid of a burdened brother or sister.

Third, loving in the sphere of the Spirit motivates giving for Christian servants—pastors and staff members (Gal. 5:6-8). A student shares (participates) with the teacher in all goods, including financial assets. Paul set forth a spiritual principle of sowing and reaping. Individuals who sow sparingly in support of Christian ministries reap a sparse spiritual harvest. In contrast, individuals who sow liberally in support of Christian ministries reap a bountiful spiritual harvest.

Fourth, loving in the sphere of the Spirit highlights the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:11-16). The legalistic Judaizers desired "to present a pleasing front to the world" (J. B. Phillips translation). Pleasing the world

entailed avoidance of the cross of Christ in favor of mere religious ritual. Christian love entails magnifying the cross of Jesus in verbal witness as well as Christian care.