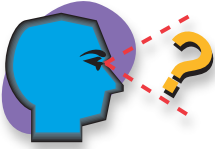




Responses to the Questions

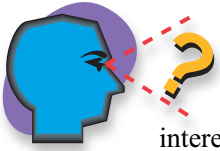


NOTE: BE SURE TO RESPOND TO ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THESE RESPONSES IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

LOVING GUIDANCE GAL. 6:1-10

1. To be “overtaken” is to suggest that one is being pursued by an enemy. We know that St. Peter urged Christians to “...be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (**I Pet. 5:8**). We also know that Paul has mentioned an active resistance from our own flesh to the life of the Spirit. In addition, St. John warns Christians of the siren call of the world, “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (**I John 2:16**). Just as the Israelites in the desert with Moses had to battle enemies within and without, so too must Christians make their way amidst opposition and attack. Paul’s description of a fall into sin as being “overtaken” by a trespass is perfectly in keeping with all that we have learned in this epistle about needing to preserve the blessedness of forgiveness and new life in Christ. Sin is no longer our master. It is not who we really are. In Christ, we are really sons of God and sin is unnatural to us. If we fall into sin, it is because we have yielded to temptation. We have been “overtaken” by an enemy.
2. Here in **vs. 1** Paul imagines a man who has done something wrong—perhaps he had submitted to circumcision, or perhaps he had gotten caught up in judging other Christians in the community who resisted it. Notice that Paul *assumes* that the guilty Christian is going to need help from others. His sin will not be a private problem with a private solution. Paul doesn’t say, “Brethren, if any of you are overtaken..., confess it to God, ask for His forgiveness, and get on with your life.” No, there will have to be others involved. “You who are spiritual” must refer to those who are leaders in the church. Jesus gave the apostles the authority to forgive sins (**John 20:23**). They passed this on to those whom they chose as leaders of the churches, through the laying on of hands. They will be the ones to help this brother back. As Catholics, we cannot miss this extremely early testimony in the life of the New Testament church that a sinner’s restoration to God required a public, not just private, response. Paul clearly writes from this perspective.
3. To “restore” something is to return it to its original state. When Paul uses this word, he acknowledges that the sinner has somehow been altered in the process of sinning. He is not in the state he was when he was justified—in a state of grace and pleasing to God. Something will have to happen to return him to that state.
4. The restoration has to be done in a spirit of “gentleness,” lest the ones handling it also become subject to sin. How? Gentleness in the face of sin can only come from one who is humble, who recognizes his own frailty, and who comprehends that God’s forgiveness of the huge debt against him must make him generous with his own forgiveness of others. Those who are harsh with sinners are in great danger of pride, self-righteousness, and conceit. The restoration of a sinner is no time for arrogance, condescension, or haughtiness. It requires the tenderness that comes from love, which always rejoices over the return of a sinner.
5. Paul seems to assume that those who are spiritual, even if they have not committed the sin of the brother overtaken in a trespass, somehow must be willing to carry that burden *as though they had*. This is an





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

interesting thought. It suggests that everyone in the Body of Christ is affected by the failure of one part of that Body. This is exactly what he wrote to the Corinthians: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (**1 Cor. 12:26**). This is the reason that restoration to life in Christ is not just a private matter. Sin has public repercussions; its remedy will, too.

6. The “law of Christ” is the law of love. Jesus, who was sinless, took our load of sin and judgment upon Himself, out of His great love for us. The innocent was willing to suffer for the guilty. If we have been initiated into His life, we will have such a profound love for sinners that we will be as willing as He was to share their burden of sin. We will not hold ourselves back in judgment and contempt. We will not secretly rejoice that we don’t sin the way they do. No, we will humbly think of their trespasses as our own, joining our prayers and penance to theirs for their restoration. Jesus sacrificed Himself for sinners; if we love Him and live in Him, so will we.

7. The person who thinks “he is something, when he is nothing,” is one who, as he considers the brother overtaken by a trespass, has in his heart the prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable about some who trust in themselves for righteousness and despise others: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector” (**Luke 18:11**). What Paul writes here is reminiscent of what St. John writes in his epistle: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1 John 1:8-9**). Recall that in this church to which Paul is writing there were Jewish Christians who have felt a kind of superiority in being Jewish. They were probably aghast at some of the behavior of the converted Gentiles. After all, these converts had recently lived as pagans, without the benefit of the strong moral heritage of the Jewish law. Perhaps the Jews wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised as a way of re-programming them from their sinful behavioral habits. Paul recognizes that this need to help the Gentile believers learn to live godly lives created a delicate situation for the Jewish Christians. Rather than recoil in righteous indignation from the horror of Gentile sin, he wants those who are spiritual to be gentle and *humble*. Not only should they not draw back in repugnance, but in gentleness they are obligated to *help* their brothers with their problems.

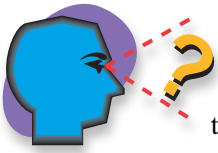
8. In the delicate work of restoring a sinner, a Christian can be tempted to self-righteousness and pride when he compares his life to that of the sinner. Paul takes aim at that temptation, reminding the Galatians that when they stand before God to give account of their lives, they will stand alone. They will have no opportunity to compare themselves to anyone. The examination will be of their individual lives, and in that, “each man will have to bear his own load.”

9. Those who are taught must understand the need to physically share in the care of their teachers. Paul here is echoing what Jesus said: “A worker is worthy of his food” (**Matt. 10:10**).

10. Paul is very concerned about two things in this letter. The first is that the Galatians will foolishly return to the Mosaic law, which depends not on the *grace* of God but on one’s own ability to keep it in order to be saved. Secondly, he recognizes that the controversy over circumcision has led to jealousy, strife, envy, dissension, party spirit—in other words, serious “works of the flesh” (see **5:19-21**) in the Galatian community. He knows what the consequences will be for them if, in the name of enhancing their own supposed spirituality, they are deceived into calling themselves God’s people while they flagrantly disobey Him. That amounts to mockery. It is a dangerous situation.

11. Paul contrasts the life of one who gratifies the desires of his own flesh (or human nature) to the life of one who obeys the Spirit. This is reminiscent of what he said in chapter five. One kind of life leads to a loss of heaven; the other is rewarded with eternal life. The passage in Romans says exactly the same thing. It is clear





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

that Paul recognizes the need for a man to choose how he will live his life, because those choices have eternal consequences. The metaphor of the sower is meant to represent the *process* of making those choices. The sower sprinkles handful after handful of seeds into the ground. Then he waits for the seeds to grow and the crop to mature. All this takes time. The final harvest will be a ripening of what was in the seed. If our choices (the seeds we sowed) were to gratify our own human natures, the crop we harvest will be exactly that—our human natures, destined to corruption. If our choices were to obey God, not gratify ourselves, by walking according to the Spirit, then our harvest will be exactly that—God Himself, blessedness forever.

12. It looks like Paul is concerned that the Galatians will experience weariness and be tempted to give up in their spiritual lives. Notice that he doesn't want them to "lose heart." What does this suggest? First, it suggests that sowing to the Spirit means work, effort, and perseverance. It means continuing to do good even when one gets tired of it. Why might one get tired of it? Because the reaping has to wait until the "due season." If the harvest of life in the Spirit is "eternal life," as Paul says, then we will have to live with delayed gratification as we sow. Certainly there are consolations along the way, budding signs of what lies ahead, but the full reward will not be realized in this earthly life. Second, it suggests the possibility that our hearts can drop out of our Christian lives. We can force ourselves to behave properly, but we are not doing it from the heart. This is called "going through the motions" of the Christian life. It can become empty and wearisome. Giving up or losing heart will prevent us from reaping the harvest of life in the Spirit. Paul seeks to encourage his friends to avoid those mistakes.

13. When Catholics speak of the need for good works in one's life in order to be pleasing to God, they are referring to the very thing Paul is writing about in this passage. These are the good acts that result from a life of sowing to the Spirit. They are done in the power of the Holy Spirit, and they show that ours is a living faith. They are *not* the "works of the law," as Paul uses that phrase. They are not done to earn God's blessing. Rather, they are done to preserve and advance that blessing. They show we are taking seriously our lives in God's family and that, by faith, we are sowing to the Spirit, in the hope of one day reaping the harvest.

14. Answers will vary. Although Paul has minced no words about the dangers presented to salvation by heresy and by living in the power of the flesh, this section of the letter is pervaded by a tone of gentle encouragement and hope. Knowing that we face the danger of the loss of baptismal grace is not supposed to discourage or terrify us. Rather, it is supposed to help us avoid presumption and pride. We will remain alert and sober. Yet we can have great *joy* as we make our way home to the Father. If we fall, we have the gracious means of being restored. If we persevere, we have every expectation of reaping the harvest. If we have internalized what Paul has taught throughout Galatians, we can have confident hope that God has done everything necessary to get us to heaven. This is the difference between slavery and sonship. Remember, slaves no more!

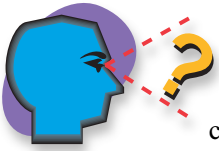
A FINAL EXHORTATION

GAL. 6:11-END

15. As he ends his letter, Paul wants the full weight of his authority to have its effect as the Galatians think about what he's written. Perhaps he felt that by writing part of it himself, he could testify in a more compelling way to their need to pay attention to him. We know that he had eye troubles, so that may explain why he wrote in large letters.

16. It appears that the motives of the Judaizers may not have been entirely pure. Paul suspects that at the root of this controversy is not theological conviction but fear and human pride. Those advocating circumcision so strongly may have been hoping to avoid persecution from the Jews, which was fierce at that time. In addition, Paul says these were not people who actually cared enough about the law to keep it. Their interest in promoting





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

circumcision lay in the desire to create an elite group, to develop a “following.” This kind of movement can have an appearance of spirituality, but the reality is that it feeds on the ego’s desire to look better than everyone else.

17. Paul, in this letter and others (see especially **Romans 2**), warns against the temptation the Jews face to glory in their heritage. All of Paul’s writings are infused with a call to humility, which is the antidote to that temptation. In this verse, he is making his point in a most dramatic way. He eschews all “glory” that might come as result of being Jewish; instead, he takes his stand on the crucifixion as the only true grounds for “glorying.” Our only glory is not what we are by birthright or heritage and not what we can accomplish on our own. Our glory is that the Lord Jesus Christ took our sin upon Himself and suffered death for us. The Cross is a powerful testimony to man’s helplessness and God’s love. All possibility of being a member of an elite group is demolished by the Cross.

18. Paul uses the same phrasing in **vs. 15** as he did in **5:6**, but with a different ending. There it was “faith working through love,” but here it is “a new creation” that really *matters*. The key to understanding this phrase is to see what he says in **vs. 16**. There he refers to this idea as a “rule” to walk by. What does he mean? He is referring again to the law of love, the new yoke Christians have taken on. The “new creation” is a reference to this new life, in which we recognize that we have died to the world and the world to us (as he says about himself in **vs. 14**). In this new life, we are now free to become servants, to God and to one another. This is precisely the same thing as “faith working through love.” Notice again that this is a far cry from saying that what really matters is “faith alone.” In Paul’s mind, what really matters is that one become a new person as a result of faith. He has already written graphically in this letter about living and walking by the Spirit. This is simply yet another way of urging the Galatians to make progress in their new lives in Christ.

19. Because he knows that the Judaizers have appealed to the Gentiles to become Jews, Paul reminds them in this benediction that they already are what they so deeply desire, and *without* the rite of circumcision. He has written to them about Abraham as the father of all who believe (recall **chapter 3**), calling those who have faith the “offsprings of Abraham” (**3:29**). Paul sees the church, not the Jewish nation, as “the Israel of God”. To address them this way weakens the lure of the Judaizers.

20. The “marks” (*stigmata* in Greek) here are probably the scars Paul had all over his body from beatings he had received at the hands of his persecutors (usually the Jews). In Paul’s day, slaves were often branded with specific marks (*stigmata*) to identify them as belonging to their masters. If his opponents cast doubt on his authority to preach against circumcision, one look at those marks ought to remedy that. By referring to these marks, Paul is claiming the closest possible identification with his Lord. They should silence those who question his authority in this matter.

21. Answers will vary. Putting together the life of Paul, before his conversion, and the ending of this letter presses in on us in the most vivid way how completely redirected his life was when he became a servant of the Lord. His zeal for God, which made him want to protect the purity of Israel’s religion, now makes him want to protect the Gentile Christians from thinking they must become Jews. His willingness to persecute the Christians has now become his willingness to be persecuted for the sake of Jesus. Rather than treating those whom he considered to be guilty in a ruthless way, he teaches that those who are overtaken in trespasses should be handled with gentleness and humility. In surrendering his life to Jesus, his desire to be a courageous and committed son of Israel has found its deepest meaning and realization.

