

Fulfilling the Law of Christ
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 Texts: Galatians 6:2-5

2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for boasting* in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5 For each one will bear his own load.

We shall discover now three headings related to **the law of Christ**, and to **burden-bearing** of Galatians 6:2-5, Paul's closing exhortations: 1. community; 2. immunity and 3. personality—these being the divisions marked out fully in Charles Spurgeon in Sermon #1283, "Burden-bearing" which source we are following this morning.

Now the biblical principle, that is the backdrop to our text on "**burden-bearing**," is quite clear: very explicit, **every man shall bear his own burden.** (Gal. 6:5) Let's see if we can explain what is meant by these divisions for v. 2.

The "community" we see referenced here is a marvelous one, the church. But, because there are those who *make it their religion* (The Pharisees of Jesus day were notoriously of this ilk.) to lay heavy burdens on other men's shoulders, we must clarify a few things. Here is a word for folks who have developed a knack for laying the guilt on others, to get something for nothing, pleading: "Don't you see, you have to help me?"

"And this without a second thought about the burden created by laying such an expectation on another brother." -CHS

So the first application of this verse (6:2) must be to *ourselves* and not to the other person *from whom you are expecting help*—in a decidedly one-sided exchange. Yes, even in a situation where everyone is expected to be giving it their best shot so as to not be an unnecessary burden to others.

Of course, when we hear **bear one another's burdens**, we are led to ask who: who is this brother/sister whose burden I am to bear? Instead of concluding this text "gives me something to do (i.e. to be equipped to help others above and beyond being our responsibilities)" our natural, sinful inclination may be to take it more as "here's my opportunity to get something for myself!" Again, that is why v.5 is added.

Moving on from Gal. 6:1, we might assume that this "burden-bearing" has mostly to do with "faults—" that fault is "the nature" of the burden we are asked to bear. That is not the main thrust here, apparently. None of us is perfect, but we still say, about "a good man" that a sensed lack of moral perfection is a weighty concern. It is connected with humility, with not "thinking too highly" of oneself! **Burden-bearing** here is helping everyone to take responsibility for the load we have elected to carry—through good and bad choices, admittedly! However, we are not to go about, saying, "He is an excellent fellow, but . . ." That qualification itself is a sin problem. (It means we have either gone to meddling, or caved to conceit.) That "boasting" is something to be avoided. Even if

we dress it up as “the discerning of spirits” . . . faultfinding in the church is a gift to be avoided. And while we are in the neighborhood, let us be reminded being hyper-critical is itself a subtle, but major fault. What a dreadful way to carry on with life!

Here’s the point Paul seems to be developing: we are not to despise those who have heavy burdens to bear—just be ready to help . We shouldn’t stand by, point fingers and embarrass anyone. Shaming is probably quite questionable outside the moment of exposure of sin, or the statement of a complaint—i.e. one should be ashamed of sin but a clearer regard, or love for the afflicted brother as as a whole dictates against the over use of shame—certainly, shaming for life is not an option.

Yet this propensity to shame the needy is much worse when it is joined to blaming mostly because “shaming and blaming” are social controls in our culture; both are prone to abuse and are too readily seized upon to advance socially, or to further political causes—as even a casual survey of the media would demonstrate this practice.

Tact, friends, is not the same virtue as discretion, but the Christians would be more readily approved of if they practiced more discretion, and tact—especially with those outside the faith. Here’s what Paul wrote on this point:

1 Cor. 5: 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? 13 But those who are outside, God [will judge] judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.
That exhortation, in context, maintains boundaries and keeps us more appropriate!

Here is an example of the subtlety involved: “O, but!” says one, “such and such a person is always afflicted, and very sad.” Should you despise the afflicted, especially the mentally afflicted, the desponding, the sorrowful among God’s people? Spurgeon asks. Are we to turn away from them and say, “I can’t endure talking with persons of that sort, they are so sad in temperament and disposition.” We get the point and needn’t enlarge upon the matter further. “Rather, we need to be schooled in how to show sympathy with the sorrowful.” As the hymn goes:

“Hast Thou a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast Thou a foe, before whose face
I fear Thy cause to plead?” -Dr. Doddridge

The second half of this verse is easier to discharge, frankly, than the first half. Who but the Lord would have us go after “the poor little lambs?” Let us tend those who are “so small and insignificant!” “Those whose bleating is muffled by just a wind,” or rushing waters. Be most careful for them! Jesus sought such as those, and wrapping them about His neck; He lovingly brought them home to fold and flock. That is the nature of burden-bearing.

Those who imagine themselves to be the center of the universe, and think that all things exist to serve and to please them, will struggle with this . . . and those who believe that many workers, hired at miserable wages, who should strive to earn their meager thanks, tips and rewards, such people will have great difficulty finding their way in a burden bearing church.

Any community is a far country to them! The self-centered, and the selfish tend to work at saving their own souls and are, well, self-serving. But as the church we are encouraged to reach out, pray beyond such narrow limits as our interests—definitely, we intercede for others. Jesus calls us to treat the selfish as your brethren anyway, in order to be treated as a brother yourself. We serve expecting our reward from our Master . . . not from other sheep.

Immunity, the second heading, for this Galatians passage, also alludes to burden bearing, but *not beyond practical and reasonable limits*. For instance, we should not take another's sin to ourselves. Just as we should not take the same of another's sin upon ourselves. If some distant relative has sin and guilt, you should not injure yourself by taking their responsibility upon yourself. You cannot do penance for them! This is spiritual over-identification and we needn't go to that extreme. In this sense, we are immune from their shame.

A faithful preacher of the word of God, for example, bears no responsibility for the reception of that word *as long as it is sincere with nothing was held back* by hesitancy, or fear of man. Remember, beloved, the salvation of souls is God's business—it lies with God to save the lost. Our part is the full exposition of the whole gospel and we must, for our sanity's sake, love the matter there. As Paul points out, cultivating is not planting and planting is not watering and none of these is harvesting. *We do not know who will harvest the fruit of the good seed; **we just trust that someone will.***

Personality, or what we might call "customization," is the third heading. Every man, uniquely and personally, shall bear his own burden and is *to do so in that manner that he elects to do it.*

This is true enough, religion if it is meaningful is *personal*. Your mother's godliness will not get you through the gate to heaven. Your father's graciousness will not deliver you to heaven's throne. No one can sponsor another in matters spiritual—it is done by oneself, or not done at all. "Everyone must come, with his own sin, to his own Savior . . . *personal religion is all that can assist us.*" Now this positive outcome comes about, typically, through "personal self-examination." We search our own souls: **examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith.** (2 Cor. 13:5)

And there is also "personal" service required . . . accomplishing that work which is ours to own. Those who expect to be carried about endlessly may, sooner or later, find themselves set down beside the road—maybe in the shade, or, alas, in the sun. There are some who live out their adulthood as if they were yet in a baby carriage—being pushed about, grotesquely, for they are adults. Spiritual parents are genuinely dismayed to find their offspring have turned out to be figuratively speaking "spiritual dwarfs" . . . "Oh, that they would grow out of their immaturity, their inactivity, their listlessness," their parents sigh. *This sloth is not what Christ meant when He urged us to be **like children**—trusting, affectionate and lovingly dependent is more like it.*

And, lastly, we should avoid being envious of other Christians. We might find, having walked even a mile in someone else's moccasins, that we are ill-suited for any burden except that which is particularly ours. I've tried wearing second-hand shoes;

and unless you can soften and remold the fit, those shoes will blister your feet until they are successfully broken in.

But when it comes to carrying another's burdens, it is important not to be too picky proud: "I don't care to do that . . . I do not wish to associate myself with that." God places us where He would have us for ultimate effectiveness, for usefulness. Where would you be if someone had been unwilling to be there for you? Grow where you are planted—it's on purpose. Living within your limits, that is, within your own ribs, is to live in a dungeon. You will never get into that mansion with many rooms . . . never enjoy the liberty of your Father's house. No one selfish lives in the Father's house.

Here's the choice before us: choose to love others more than you love yourself. **Prefer others to yourself.** Remember that Jesus carried you; or you would have been lost and, perhaps, abandoned forever. If you cannot do this for yourself ask God to help you do it for His glory and to His everlasting praise. We ought to love one another.

The result will be this: that others, seeing how loving we are of God and towards each other—how we are transformed by our life in the body!—that they will exclaim, as they have over faithful Christians in every generation, "How these Christians love each other!" ***I want to be like them. How these Christians form the support group I truly need to live the life I want to live***—loving God, free from sin—serving others and finding purpose and fulfillment in my own Christian life! We were not made to make it on our own. We were made for God and by serving the Lord we are blessed. Doing as we are told, **sharing each others' burdens**, we are most fully alive! And even if we aren't ecstatically happy all the time, even if we have things to endure in and work through, the joys that do come to us regularly are sufficient—no, not merely sufficient; rather more than enough. It is Christ in me that makes life winnable, and rewarding.

Amen