

Beyond Contradiction  
 “Freed from the taint to become a saint!”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 3 July 2022  
 Texts: Galatians 6:2-5

“There is, too, so vital and intimate [and real] a connection between the whole body of humanity, between Adam the head and all the members of the body corporate, that Adam’s fall becomes ours. ADAM’S RUIN OUR RUIN, AND THE TAINT IN THE BLOOD IS TO BE FOUND IN US ALL. Some of you are “dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore this burden is no more a burden to you than the heavy clods of the churchyard are to the bodies that lie beneath them. But if you were ever quickened by divine grace, you will soon find that **the body of this death**, as Paul calls indwelling sin, is a very heavy burden to battle with and you will have to *personally fight out the conflict within your own soul.*”  
 -Charles Spurgeon

The *taint in the blood*? A kind of spiritual blood poisoning? *Vital and intimate* and real connection? Two evidences of the solidarity of the human race appear in this brief Spurgeon quote. And the truth of our “battling with indwelling sin ‘*personally, within your own soul*’ is a truth anchored in the blood and the vital connection of all humanity are substantial considerations—worthy and weighty ones. But they lie beneath the theme of today’s sermon: which is burden bearing as it affects us personally and as it affects our interactions with each other. ***It is difficult to conceive of how a person, who is unreconciled with God—or, is still in an active sin rebellion and state of hostility towards God—could possibly bring peace with God into any circumstance.*** *No one can give away that which he does not possess—nor is any expected to give beyond that which has been supplied for him first!* Therefore, if you hope to be a peacemaker, the first thing to secure is your own center, your own peace. It is analogous to getting your footing and a good grip before attempting to lift a load—if your footing is sure and your grip is solid, then, *with the strength that God has apportioned to you(!)*, you lift! Now the same thing applies, I think to burden lifting. In the order to things, helping lift the burdens of the world is built upon the foundation of lifting the burdens of our brothers and sisters *in the church, in the fellowship of the saints*. Note this is not instead of, but a matter of in addition to—after you have borne the burden of your brothers and sisters in the faith, then, on top of your personal burden-bearing (prayer, confession, repentance, contrition). After you have transferred your burden to Christ (our footing), our Burden-Bearer, and after we **Cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you**, (1 Peter 5:7) which corresponds to our grip (!) then we are ready to place the oxygen mask on those in need/with burdens(!) around us.

In Pilgrim’s Process, we discover Christian’s burden of sin depicted figuratively as an enormous weight, or load upon his shoulders. He loses that burden at Calvary. It is rolled off him and onto Christ. The next development is that this burden rolls down the hill and into the tomb where it is sealed away, gone forever. Remember the freedom, the elation and the joy that comes to Christian when he has personally dealt with his own burden of sin. Now he is free to make progress and is freed to go forward to the armory where he is given the weapons he will need, fully equipped and fully supplied, for the upcoming battles. And, most notably, he is now enabled to take up companionship with other pilgrims—some saved, and some not so ready!

So, as we prepare to dive into the apparent contradiction of Galatians 6:2-5, here is another crucial verse which frames the priority of being right with God, of having been comforted by

God as being foundational to a burden bearing we might undertake towards our brothers, or towards the world in general. **And so fulfill the law of Christ:**

**3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank [a]my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed [b]in you,**

#### Footnotes

a. 1 Corinthians 1:4 Two early mss do not contain *my*

b. 1 Corinthians 1:6 Or *among*

Verses 2 and 5 of Galatians 6 *appear* to be contradictory. I use the word “appear” advisedly, because the plain reading of each lays out very *opposite* commands: **bear one another’s burdens** and then **each man must carry his own burden**. This is a challenge even if you want to affirm the truth of scripture not contradicting scripture! Caution is advised for those who, in their own minds have worked this thing through to our successful integration of both verses. The realization that they are complementary, not contradictory, changes nothing about the obvious difficulty.

Lynne and I labored a considerable moment on this very point of contradiction. She said, “I find this confusing.” And I said, “Really? What’s the problem?” And if I could interpret her look, it might run something like: “Are you kidding me? Don’t you see how *obvious* it is: these exhortations are contradictory on the face of things!” I shook my head and tried to move on. Then, as I studied the matter more, I found that both Charles Spurgeon and Alexander Maclaren were on Lynne’s side! They both agreed that there was a problem, a perplexity that could be described as a “contradiction” here. That made it three to one. So I conceded.

Therefore this morning I will clear up, I hope and God willing, some of the perplexity.

Here’s the deal: if you haven’t front-loaded your burden on Christ, the supreme Burden-Bearer, you are in no position to undertake your Christian duty. The first step in burden-bearing is carrying/shifting my burden onto Jesus’ shoulders, or onto the cross. Only when I have done that am I positioned to step up and **bear another’s burdens**, (v. 2) . . . **having borne my own burden** (v. 6) first in the church and, thirdly, with the wider world. That’s the first part of the perplexity addressed—verse 2 and 5 are related.

Here’s another part: defining our terms. Burdens fall, generally, into two classes: those that everyone bears, and those that I must bear alone. And when it comes to those burdens, I must bear alone or burdens for everyone, we note that these classifications differ between believers, the godly; and unbelievers, the ungodly. Unbelievers are definitely on their own and, sadly, nothing they will ever say, or do will have lasting significance, impact, or value. They are only for now: dust, sound and fury signifying nothing—there is nothing everlasting about worldly accomplishments.

That reality’s what we shall dig into this morning so that, in the end, you will know what it takes to **fulfill the law of Christ**.

We are reminded that the **law of Christ** is very straightforward: **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul; and, secondly, love thy neighbor as thyself.** *It is incumbent upon me then to remind you that according to scripture, as reinforced by our Lord's endorsement of the greatest commandment, we do possess a heart, soul and mind. They all exist, are real, and each can be changed—even if it takes the power of God, or the power of God manifest in His word to do so.*

When worldly “authorities” (professors, teachers, counselors secular social workers—and especially politicians (as echoed in the media, and in entertainment) tell you, from their materialistic standpoint, that these “things” do not exist. They won’t necessarily say so overtly (it’s the message) . . .they will deflect the truth of heart, soul and mind reality with, “Oh, it’s a spiritual,” or “religious thing.” Then hasten to add that they aren’t “religious” but believe “in science.” Faced with that, we can ask either 1. which “science” is it that you believe in (sciences are many and have “evolved”—read, changed—over time; or 2. we can inquire, “If this your view with regard to all abstract nouns/ideas/concepts? For example, if social justice is non-material, like heart, soul and mind, doesn’t really exist and if such ideas are fictions, simply made up, wishful thinking. Do you recuse yourself from political engagement and activism of all sorts? Why vote if it’s all “mythological?” *It’s always appropriate to ask if someone’s actions are consistent with their worldview.*

Ask for more information: “What do you mean by science? Do you mean the current state of established science? And, if that is what you believe in, what will you believe in tomorrow when the goal posts have been moved . . . yet again? What do you mean by “believe in?” Blind faith? If your “state of science” is dated by a decade, or more, have you considered what an upgrade would look like? Isn’t that a rather unsettling and tenuous life philosophy? One has “more work to do” if that’s your working hypothesis!

I can appreciate your struggle, friend, but I can only do that as an outsider to your faith community. We do not share the same presuppositions and, until we have defined our terms more carefully, any meaningful communication is going to be a challenge. Shall we try? In case we miss the point, I have just described the burden of witnessing to the lost confused, or thoughtless.

As I hope to clear up some perplexity on burden bearing, you should realize that I have already laid a foundation by establishing a priority order: first we lay our burdens on Christ, then, and only then, are we able to get about the business of helping others with their burdens. Bluntly stated, we must inform others, those who are burdened, that they need to imitate us: shift your burdens onto Jesus’ shoulders. “For we are weak, whereas He is strong!” The person who lives to God ***lives truly***, as the ancient mystics have written, *and he who lives truly, lives freely*. And both truth and freedom are marks of the **abundant life** that Christ came to establish on earth, both in us and through us!

Moving on, what about these burdens everyone bears? They are sin, guilt, responsibility, sorrows, griefs and the quest for righteousness and holiness. *All men everywhere face these things whether they are saved, or not.* A man of faith is in a better position, I suggest, than those who have no God!

As we ponder these sober realities, some immediate thoughts flood into our minds: 1. **God is good and upright**; loving and righteous. These attributes of God appear to function as the poles on a bipolar molecule (like water!)—molecules that have a positive and negative charge on either

end, or side. *The key point is they are disparate traits of the same molecule.* Anyway, this is the God with whom we have to do in our dealing with our burdens. He is good and upright. 2. In real life, we are not always in synch with God in the realm of our desires and His purposes. We want to be happy; He wants us to be holy. We seek too little, God purposes much more. 3. Further He wants His character to be formed in us, which is to say He wants us to be more like Jesus and less like ourselves. Character matters chiefly because it matters to God; character is very personal, very relational and it is a matter of design, rather than social construction. 4. Finally, God seeks to be as a Father to us and He desires for us to be as His children—trusting, obedient and loving. This is evident from the history of His engagements with the human race as well as from the teachings of His Son.

Related to God being **good and upright, loving and righteous**. We read in scripture: Psalm 99:8: **O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them, And yet an avenger of their evil deeds.** The NIV renders this verse thus: **LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Evil deeds, misdeeds, wrongdoings, inventions, practices, doings, sinful/shameful/abominable deeds, actions** all translate the Hebrew *alilah* (עֲלִילָה): wantonness, a deed. *These are the things forgiven . . . AND these are the things avenged, punished with consequences.* The retribution of the Lord is not “the wild justice of revenge;” it is more like the impersonal action of public law. It is “the just recompense, to reward that divinely dogs all sin.” *Forgiveness is not primarily a matter of conduct. It is a matter of disposition and/or attitude.* We separate it from “pardon,” a criminal is pardoned but the word “forgiveness” is another matter—forgiveness is the deliberate cessation of alienation, hostility, and hatred. It is the purging of the heart of those things instigated by the offense of sin.

And, while we are in this neighborhood, it is worth suggesting that the highest type of forgiveness is “paternal.” In the “childhood” of our relationship to God the Father, it is seeing the Father’s face cleared of any cloud of displeasure.<sup>1</sup> This is so because God is Love and God is Righteousness.

Given that we are out of synch sometimes, frequently, it is great news that we can be spiritually recalibrated—yes, changed by the power of God to the glory of God. The supreme form of that transformation is what we mean by conversion. On our side prayer, confession and daily repentance (our Christian burdens), God hearing our cry responds with healing power. He first loves us that we might be able to love in return.

Character. Becoming Christlike is the life plan of God for each of us—all of us, more like Jesus *in order to reach our full potential as a believing child of God.* This world, just as it is, a mixture of darkness and light, sorrow and joy, it is perfectly designed for character formation. Call it chastisement consequences, or vice versa, the result is growth, maturation. Through suffering we learn perseverance and obtain endurance and these two issue in hope.

I find it wonderful, and somewhat amusing, that part of the “getting to know each other” in human courtship entails “meeting the family” in hopes of “joining the family.” What is true in human family life pertains in divine family life. What a great thing to remember as we head out for Fourth of July events this year. But as we celebrate our freedoms, our blessings, I urge us to

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<sup>1</sup> Maclaren likens sin to the dropping of a great black rock into the stream of divine love—the flow is blocked by our action! When the love of God rises and overflows that rock, all is well because forgiveness has been “bestowed and received.” -Expositions of Scripture. Ps 99:8

be mindful of the opportunities to expand God's family. How? By burden-bearing . . . by loving and compassionate living. By noticing those truly in need, truly hurting and comforting them with the love of God available in Christ Jesus . . . yes, the one thing we can take with us are all the "family" members we pick up in Christ as we live out our faith.

**Amen.**