

Bearing each other's burdens

Galatians 5:25-6:1

Pastor Tim Melton

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

⁶ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

In these verses the Apostle Paul calls those who are living by the Spirit to bear the burdens of others. Knowing that it is at times a difficult task, he brings together various truths to help the reader understand and apply these teachings to their lives.

The Galatians could either walk in the flesh or walk by the Spirit. In previous verses Paul clearly described the sinfulness of those who choose to walk in the flesh, and the certain failure that awaits them as they trust in their own power and their own merits to be made right with God. Rules and consequences will never be enough to work righteousness in one's life.

Paul then goes on to describe the life of a person who believes in Jesus Christ and is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Yes, they started as an enemy of God, but they now have been forgiven, made new, and are counted righteous in the eyes of God. This person lives by the Spirit. The motivations for and the abilities to be holy now come from the Spirit who lives within them. The fear of judgment no longer threatens them. Instead they now hunger and thirst for righteousness because of what God, through Jesus Christ, has done for them. They are now motivated by love and carried along by the Holy Spirit.

➤ ***25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.***

This phrase “keep in step” was a military term. The soldier did not set the pace, or the direction. He merely submitted to the stride and the speed of his commanding officer and kept in step. The soldier was to completely trust his commanding officer, even to the point of following Him into battle and risking his life. That is our role with the Holy Spirit. We are not to get ahead of Him or behind Him. We surrender to His guidance, fully trusting in His leadership and purpose of where He leads us.

Paul’s phrase “living by the Spirit” is synonymous with the phrase “those who belong to Christ”, found in the previous verse. If one is “living by the Spirit” and “belonging to Christ”, there are several truths that are already at work in their lives. First of all they have been convicted of their sin. This means that through the work of the Holy Spirit they have been broken over their past wickedness and have been made aware of their desperate need for salvation. Secondly, they have turned from their sin and have believed in Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit their hearts have been turned from sin and selfishness and towards a desire for and trust in Christ. They are aware that all credit for their salvation and their right standing with God now goes completely to the finished work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing they can brag or boast about. As we see in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

In summary, if one is truly “living by the Spirit”, then he has been brought low once he realized the wickedness of his heart and has been lifted up by the gift of God’s grace. This has resulted in humility, gratitude, love and compassion for others. The awareness of one’s sin and appreciation for God’s grace are essential, if one is to obey what the Apostle Paul writes in chapter.

➤ ***26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.***

Paul instructs the Galatians to not become conceited, provoking each other, or envying each other. In the context of this letter to the Galatians there are two types of people who were likely to become conceited. One was those who were bearing the fruit of the Spirit. It was great that their lives were living in obedience to Christ, but if not careful one could grow complacent or take their eyes off of Christ and start comparing themselves to others. The other persons who might be drawn into being conceited would be those who continued to live under the flesh. As they compared themselves to the law they would find only failure and insecurity. This would motivate them to live in hypocrisy, presenting themselves as righteous when their heart is far from God.

If one is living in the flesh or forgetting the truths of the gospel, he or she could easily be led into spiritual competition and tension with others. In some way they could provoke others in ways that should not characterize followers of Christ. Without Christ there is insecurity and for many the need to prove themselves, prove significance and show themselves to be successful. Needing to impress leads one in to gossip, boasting, or being ungentle because authenticity is too risky.

In Christ we realize that all glory is His and that all our needs are met in Him. There is no longer a need to vindicate ourselves or to “win”. We can learn from John the Baptist on this point. In John 3 his disciples come to him and say, *“Look, he (Jesus) is baptizing, and all are going to him.”* In John’s response we find these words, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30). In Christ

all pressure to impress or receive credit has been removed. Our purpose now is to live in a way that will point people to the glory of Christ Jesus. There no longer is the need or any room in the Christian life to bring attention or glory to ourselves.

Paul also saw the need to address the danger of envying one another. Envy shows a discontentment in Christ and possibly an attitude of “I deserve what they have”. But we can never forget that we deserve nothing. We were wicked, enemies of God, deserving only death and hell. And instead we received grace and peace for eternity. There is no place for envy in the life of a Christian. Yes, there will be difficult days, but we must never forget that we have already been given so much more than we deserve. Envy is forgetting the blessings that have already been found in Christ and coveting the things and approval of this world.

All three of these offenses show people who were focused on their own selfish desires and had been drawn away from Christ-centered living. They had forgotten the truths of the Gospel.

The previous warnings were just in preparation for the instructions that Paul gives in the beginning of Galatians 6:

➤ ***“If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”***

This word “caught” is not specifically talking about someone who is caught in the act of committing a sin. It is more like an animal that is drawn into a trap. It is talking about a person who unintentionally was drawn into sin. This does not mean the person is not guilty. It just means it was not pre-meditated sin. We know that the devil schemes to bring the children of God into sin.

Ephesians 6:10-11 tells us, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”*

The devil works to Christians into sin, but they will never be able to claim that, “I am innocent. The devil made me do it.”

As we see in James 1:14, *“Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own evil desires.”* Yes, the person was caught in a transgression, but the only reason they were susceptible to the temptation was because of their own sinful desires.

“If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”

The word “transgression” here is not the word that Paul uses at other times for blatant, intentional sins. It is a word that means to stumble, fall or blunder. It would be like walking on slippery ice or a dangerous path. It would be the opposite of “keeping in step” that Paul referred to earlier. It is those who have inadvertently fallen into sin and gotten out of step.

Paul then instructs those who are spiritual to restore the transgressors. At first glance this seems to be saying, “those who are super spiritual”, but in the larger context of Paul’s writings to the Galatians it is best understood as “those who have the Spirit.” That would include all believers in Christ. All who are walking by the Spirit.

All Christians should restore the one who has fallen out of step. The word restore used here was used for mending fishing nets or resetting broken bones. It is never intended for punishment, but as a cure. A cure that returns one to his or her earlier nearness to Christ. It is turning one's attention to God's perspective of their sin, of their need for Him, and of His grace. At times there may be painful consequences as one seeks to "get back in step" with the Lord, but the pain should not be because of our harsh or self-righteous attitude. We should always strive to speak the truth in grace and usher them back towards God.

Those who are spiritual are then instructed to restore the transgressors in a spirit of gentleness. The spirit of gentleness is rooted in one's memory of the gospel. How we were dead in sin and then saved by grace through faith. This brings one back to a place of humility. As we restore another we must remember that we are constantly in need of the grace of God, ministering to another person who is constantly in need of the grace of God. This gentleness is rooted in the truth of Matthew 7:4-5, *"How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."*

It is only as we go back to our own problem with sin and God's grace that our heart is prepared to restore a brother or sister who is "out of step" with Christ.

One interesting side note is that in the following verse in Matthew 7, after Jesus had spoken about the log and the speck, we find these words:

⁶ "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

He is merely saying that not everyone is ready to be restored. There will be some that will reject your gracious words of restoration because their hearts are hardened and they don't have "ears to hear". Jesus likened that to putting precious pearls in front of a pig. Pigs have no appreciation of the value of the pearls so they trample them. Or you could also describe them as people who know they are out of step with the Spirit and want to continue in that direction.

As we gently seek to be used by God to help one to return to being in step with the Spirit Paul warns us to be careful. When helping others some are tempted to think more highly of themselves than they ought. Some are tempted to trust in their own words of advice instead of the wisdom of God. Others may be tempted to fall into the very same sin that they are counseling against. We need to constantly be asking God to search our hearts to see if there is any impure way in us. We are often unaware of our own sin and the schemes of Satan that are being brought against us. We should join with David in his prayer in Psalm 139:23-24:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

➤ ***² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.***

Paul then instructs the Galatians to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. This word for burden that Paul uses here is an immense burden or heavy load that one person could not possibly bear. In this context it is primarily referring to a burden of someone who is caught in

sin, but this idea of “bearing each other’s burdens” applies to every area of life. This law of Christ is found in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And how did Christ love us? Selflessly, sacrificially, as a servant, with a pure heart, in obedience to God the Father, with truth and love. As we bear each other’s burdens we are displaying the love of Christ. It not only helps our brothers and sisters in Christ, it also draws the attention of the unbelievers who are watching. As we love like Christ they realize that we belong to Him.

➤ ***³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.***

Paul then warns them about the tendency to think of themselves as more significant than they are. Our world struggles with this. Even in the church we struggle with this concept of “searching for significance”, but that is not a biblical idea. Remember the words of John the Baptist, “That He would increase and that I would decrease.” God is the one who is significant. We are loved by the Significant One. We are forgiven by the Significant One. We are invited to come near the Significant One. We are children of the Significant One. But we must never forget that He is the One who is significant. Don’t be deceived. Yes, we clearly need love and forgiveness, but the concept of making a name for ourselves or being significant is foreign in the scriptures when discussing the true needs of man. Our needs are met in Him. Not in how we feel about ourselves or how others feel about us. Our identity is secure in Christ. He is significant and He lives in us.

We have come from sin and are only here because of the grace of God. On our own we are nothing, but in Him we have everything. Even when we are a tool in the hand of God all glory is His. We must not let pride keep us from restoring one in need because “it is below us”. We must also not let pride tempt us to act self-righteous and haughty as we help restore another in need.

➤ ***⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.***

Some may argue that if we always help others then they will take advantage of us, but Paul now brings balance to the conversation. In verse 4 he is saying to evaluate yourself. By the grace of God take responsibility of your own faith. Ask God to reveal the condition of your heart. Stay in God’s Word as the constant reflection of what is happening in your life. Then any reason to boast will not be because you are better than others, but because of what has done in your life. Any boast will not be in how well someone else carried your burden but how you, through the grace of God, have carried your own burden.

The final verse talks of each bearing his own load. Paul chooses interesting words here. The first mention of bearing another’s burden, in verse 2, used a word that meant a huge burden that one person could not possibly carry. If a person is in that situation with sin, help them. Here in verse 5 Paul now uses the words “his own load” that would mean something like a light backpack. So as followers of Christ we are responsible for our own faith before God. In the same time we should bear the burdens of all who are overcome with their load.

In summary, when we are fully convinced that we are terrible sinners who must wholly trust in Christ's righteousness alone before God, the result is a Christ-like life. Humility and gratitude now characterize our hearts. We are gracious because we have received grace. We are merciful because we have received mercy. We no longer judge others, because we are readily aware of our own sin. We are indebted to Christ and now are motivated to love others, because His Spirit lives in us. For just as Christ condescended to our weakness and bore our burdens so we might share in His righteousness, we understand the grace given us in Him, and rejoice that we should do likewise and condescend to each other's weaknesses and bear each other's burdens. It is a joyful giving of oneself because another, namely Christ, has given of himself for us.

If we bring ourselves back to the gospel at the beginning of every day, we are humbled by our sin, our sinfulness and our brokenness. Pride is swept away and we no longer think more highly of ourselves. As we once again have been reminded of the "bad news" of our sin we then are lifted up with the "good news" of His grace. We have been forgiven. We are loved. We have been adopted. We are secure. Christ is in us and we are in Him. We no longer have to earn love or perform for the approval of man. We are in Christ. Our Father treasures us, cares for us, provides for us and loves us. We are secure, so we no longer need to devour each other, or put others down to raise ourselves up, or brag about what we have done so everyone knows, or be broken if we don't succeed in some earthly endeavor.

By the grace of God we are now free to bear our "light burden", while at the same time helping those who are in need of help to carry their heavy burden.

May we walk in step with the Spirit and be used to help restore those who are out of step. Heaven knows we will probably need them to do the same for us one day.