

Bearing Burdens

Galatians 6:1-5

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Background Notes

In Galatians 5:1 we were exhorted to *“stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”* What a blessing it is to know that we are set free from the yoke of bondage! We are not saved by working for our salvation, and we are not made more holy by working for our sanctification. Good works certainly do have a place in the Christian life - but **not** as a *means* of salvation or sanctification. Good works and service for the Lord are the **result** of our salvation and sanctification.

We often quote Ephesians 2:8-9, and rightly so, to show that God is looking for faith - not human effort as the means of our salvation: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* But we should also quote verse 10 to show where works do come in the Christian life: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

Good works do have a place in the Christian life - but not as the means of salvation or sanctification. We are **God’s** “handiwork” – not *our* handiwork! Our grateful response should be love and service for our Lord Jesus Christ - and God has already prepared areas of service where we can serve Him with good works. God has a plan for your life!

Are you involved in the good works of service that God has prepared for you? If you don’t know what those good works are, here’s a suggestion. Just jump in and get involved! Start serving in an area of need around you, and you’ll find the area of service that God has chosen for you. The rest of the body of Christ will let you know where you fit in (and where you don’t fit in!). The body has a great way of giving us good and helpful feedback, so we can joyfully serve in the area best suited for us.

In chapter 5 we also learned that we are not to let our liberty in Christ be used as a license or an excuse to sin. We are free to serve, not to sin. Galatians 5:13: *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty as an*

opportunity for the flesh but through love, serve one another.” We learned that the way to deal with sin in our lives is to walk in the Spirit. The more we are in fellowship with the Lord and walking with Him through the Spirit, the less we will be involved in sin.

If you’re walking in the Spirit, how will you interact with your fellow believers? The last verse of chapter 5 warns us about the ways we are **not** to treat each other. These behaviors will characterize us if we are **not** walking in the Spirit. *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (5:26).*

For example, if a fellow believer has a great musical talent that I don’t have but have always wanted, and I’m obviously jealous and envious, then it’s clear that I am **not** walking in the Spirit. (Did you know that I took piano lessons for four years and I still can’t play a single song?) And if the believer with the great musical talent is obviously conceited and proud about that musical gift, he or she is not walking in the Spirit either.

In chapter 6, we see how we will treat other believers if we are walking in the Spirit.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should bear one another’s burdens.

Verse 2: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

If we are walking in the Spirit, we will bear one another’s burdens. The word *“burdens”* here can refer to failures, temptations, tests, trials, heavy loads of sorrow or suffering, as well as workloads of home, family or ministry. What do you do if you see a fellow believer struggling under the weight of one of these heavy burdens? Do you run the other way? Do you offer advice - but you don’t offer to help? Or do you anything you can to help share that load?

Recently some of you had the opportunity to help with VBS. Running a VBS program can be quite a burden if only a few people have to carry the whole workload. It was great that so many of you pitched in and helped. If you helped out in any capacity, you have fulfilled the law of Christ – and no doubt you received a blessing in your own hearts and lives as well!

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” The “law of Christ” means all the commands given by our Lord Jesus that are found in the New Testament. The “law of Christ” could be summed up under the Lord’s commandment to “love one another.” *“This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).* Look also at Galatians 5:14: *“For all the law was fulfilled even in this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

In Galatians 6:1 the apostle used the example of helping to bear the burden of someone who has failed because of sin: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”* What do you do when a brother or sister fails because of sin? Do you

write them off? Do you say it serves them right? Do you tend to gloat over their failure, or feel proud and self-satisfied with your “more holy life”? Or do you come alongside them and gently try to restore that failing believer to fellowship with the Lord?

Yes, there must be repentance for sin, and perhaps there must be the discipline of the local church as well, but believers who are spiritual should aim to **restore** that person - **with gentleness**. Remember, **gentleness is a character trait that is the fruit of walking in the Spirit**. Galatians 5:22-23: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”*

Here’s an illustration. As a teacher at a Bible college, I use the honor system for tests. Occasionally a student will come to me and confess that he or she has cheated. My responsibility is to discipline, but also to restore that repentant student - with a spirit of gentleness. Sometimes a student must be asked to leave the college because of a serious infraction of the rules or personal sin, and in that situation it is my responsibility to write pastoral letters – to make a genuine effort towards restoration.

“Those who are spiritual” (v1) does not mean church leaders only. *“Those who are spiritual”* would be any believer who is walking with the Lord, and who truly cares about the failing person, and who doesn’t have a personal agenda.

The restoration process should **always include accountability** in some form. Sometimes believers fall back and commit the same sin over and over again because, during the restoration process, personal accountability to at least one mature, spiritual believer has not been established. This is a very important part of the restoration process.

Helping a believer who has failed is a great ministry. For the health of the body of Christ, it is important for believers to bear one another’s burdens.

2. Believers shall bear their own burdens.

Verse 5: *“For each one shall bear his own load.”*

This verse almost sounds like a contradiction of verse 2! In fact, some translations use the same word - *“burden”* - in both verses 2 & 5. But this is not a contradiction, because *two different Greek words* are used for *“burden”* in the original Greek manuscript.

The Greek word in verse 2 means “a heavy crushing load” - whereas the Greek word used in verse 5 means “a light load.” The Greek word used in verse 5 is the same word used by the Lord in Matthew 11:30 when He said that His yoke is easy, and His **burden** is light.

Notice that the verb tense in verse 5 is **future** – *“For each one shall bear his own load.”* The point in this verse is that we will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ in the future. There we will answer to the Lord for how we carried our

“load” of responsibility in our earthly lives as believers. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one must receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

These verses are addressed to believers. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not be able to compare ourselves to others who may have failed, as verse 4 indicates. No, we will be examined individually for how we carried the “light load” of responsibilities that the Lord gave us. Verse 4: *“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.”*

At the Judgment Seat, we won’t be able to say that we couldn’t carry our “light load” of responsibilities. Why not? Why won’t we have any excuse for not having the strength to do what God called us to do? Because ***the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit is available to us!*** The Holy Spirit will enable us to successfully carry whatever “light load” the Lord asks us to carry. And if your load seems too heavy, ask the Lord for help!

As we examine our service for the Lord now, we should do so in light of the coming Judgment Seat of Christ. We will answer to the Lord for how we lived our own lives – we won’t be able to compare ourselves to others! Believers shall bear their own burdens.

Practical Application

Don’t think you are something, when you are nothing.

Verses 2-3: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”*

Some Christians think that they are so important that it is beneath their dignity to help bear the burdens of other believers. People who think that way are only deceiving themselves. In reference to the divine standard of perfection, they are nothing (v3)!

1 Corinthians 4:7 says, *“And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you have not received it?”* Everything we are and everything we have is only because of God’s grace. We have no basis for pride.

Then there are other Christians who think they are so spiritual that they will never fail. They think that they will never need help from other believers. These Christians also deceive themselves, because they forget that they are only dust. God has ways of humbling us so that we will need the help of fellow believers.

In reference to failure because of sin, let us never forget the truth of that well-known phrase: “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Don’t think you are something when you are nothing.