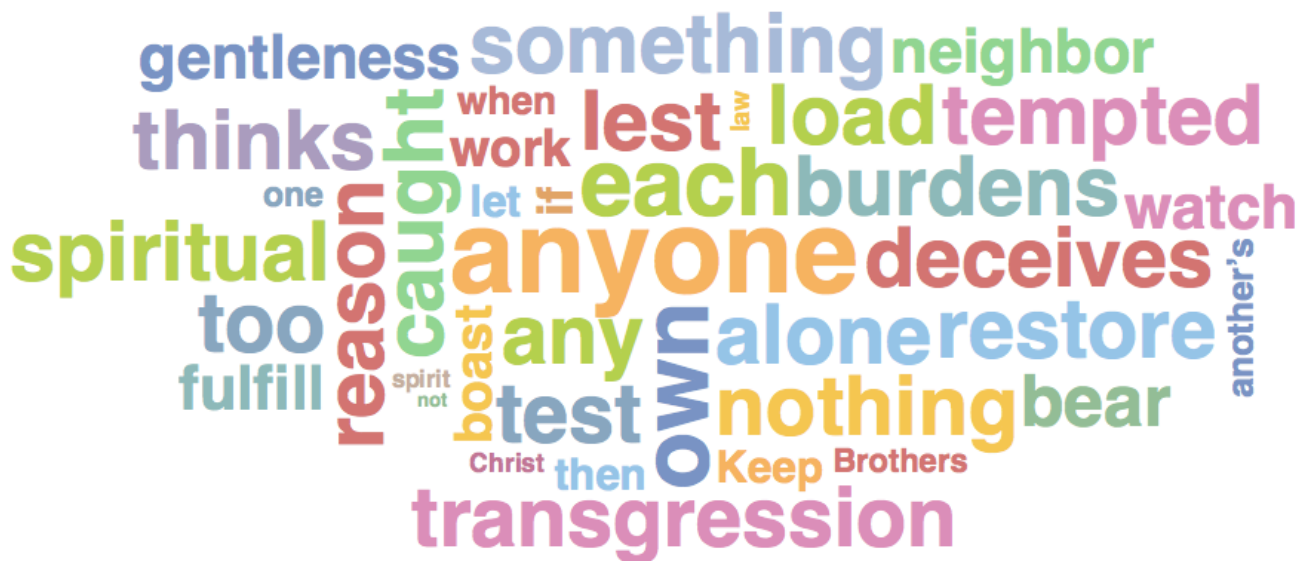


Sermon Series: *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*

Bear One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:1-5 (ESV)

- 1 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.



Introduction

Whom does Paul have in mind as he is writing this paragraph?

The first word is “brothers” (Greek *adelphoi*), which means all siblings in a family, both brothers and sisters. So we know he has in mind generally all the believers in the churches in Galatia. However, does he have some particular persons in mind? Are there some persons from within the body of believers whom he is now focusing his attention upon? To answer this question, we might ask ourselves a couple of questions.

Whom does he warn in verse 1 to “keep watch on yourself?” Whom does he say should “restore” those who have fallen? Whom does he admonish not to “think he is something, when he is nothing?” Whom is he instructing to “test his own work?” (v. 4) Is it the one who has fallen into sin

or is it the ones who are spiritual? The answer is, Paul is directing his attention to those “who are spiritual.”

Paul is writing this paragraph with those who are “**spiritual**” in mind. It is this word, “spiritual” that connects this paragraph (vs. 1-5) with the paragraph we looked at last week. Last week Andy preached on verses 19-26 in which Paul contrasts the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit.” The final two verses in chapter five sum up the main point of the previous paragraph and lead us into the paragraph we just read a moment ago. The last verse of chapter five also exposes, perhaps, the greatest temptation for all Christians.

Galatians 5:25-26 (ESV)

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

The whole point of the previous paragraph (vs. 16-24) is that the purpose of the Christian life is to “**walk by the Spirit.**” The Christian life is to be both directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Every decision the child of God makes is to be informed (i.e. “led” Gal 5:18) by the Holy Spirit. And the very power to live life in that way comes from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit Himself. We do not naturally have the power in ourselves to live like that. Living life led by the Spirit is living in complete liberty! True freedom comes from being enslaved to Christ through the transformational power of the Holy Spirit.¹ Living life willingly submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit frees one from the burdens of legalism.

The Great Enemy of Spiritual Living: Pride

However, the great enemy that militates against a Spirit-led-life is **pride**. In Gal 5:25-6, notice Paul’s line of thinking. After mentioning that we are to “walk by the Spirit” he immediately brings up pride. He writes, “Let us not become conceited.” Conceit is “excessive pride in one’s self; vanity.” Paul knows that pride and self-conceit is the secret backdoor through which Satan creeps into the lives of God’s children and subtly works destruction.

The notion of conceit serves as bookends to the meat of the primary expression of the Spirit-led life in this passage. Paul first brings it up in **5:26** and then again in **6:3** when he says,

Galatians 6:3 (ESV)

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

This kind of thinking is the *antithesis* to the kind of thinking that should govern a life of walking by the Spirit. The Spirit led life is marked by humility. However, a life controlled by the flesh is marked by pride. Pride may be the greatest enemy of **walking by the Spirit**. It is this sin that Paul is warning “those who are spiritual” to be on guard against.

“Spiritual” Persons

Now let’s turn our attention to the “spiritual” persons. Paul has something different in mind than what most people today would mean by the word “spiritual.” Paul has in mind those in Galatia who have not embraced legalism. He is thinking of those who understand that justification before God does not come as a result of doing good deeds. By “spiritual” persons he means those who understand that life in Christ comes by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by their own self-effort.

¹ See Romans 6:17-22 (cf. 1 Cor 4:1; Eph 6:6; Phil 1:1).

He means those who live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. He means those who have been born again by faith in Jesus. He means people whose spiritual life **began** by faith in Jesus and whose spiritual life is **maintained** by faith in Jesus. He means believers who know that they cannot be sanctified by their own fleshly efforts or by their own will power.

What does a “spiritual” person look like? When you think of what it means to be “spiritual,” what comes to mind?

- A person who attends church regularly?
- A person who wears nice clothes to church?
- A person who uses certain “churchy” words?
- A person who is well informed of current theological issues and trends?
- A person who carries a BIG Bible?
- A person who attends lots of events at church?
- A person who listens to music in the “Christian” genre?
- A person who teaches a Sunday school class?
- A person who says he prays a lot?
- A person who reports that she reads her Bible through every year?
- A person who is loving and accepting and affirming of all people no matter how they live?
- A person who always appears to be happy and never lets anything discourage her?
- Or is a spiritual person one who can quote lots of Bible verses?
- None of the above.
- Some of the above.
- None of the above.

Paul just listed the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24) but then he immediately adds one characteristic of a Spirit-led person by way of a practical illustration—**restoring a person who has been caught in sin**. A spiritual person is one who finds a brother trapped in sin and then seeks to restore that person. Paul chooses to characterize a spiritual person not by some intrinsic, individual characteristic but by a quality that is exercised in relationship to other believers.

Individual spiritually finds its highest benefit when it humbly labors for the sanctification of other believers. This is what love really is. Love, rightly understood (as taught in the Bible), is laboring for the eternal good of another person. This is why love is the fulfillment of the whole law (Gal 5:14). True Christianity is not a solitary religion. Sanctification is not limited to inward working of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is also a community project.

Caught In Any Transgression

The ESV and NIV use the word “caught.” The NASB and KJV use the word “overtaken.” The word translated “caught” is *prolambanō* (προλαμβάνω). It has the following meanings: “to overtake, to

come upon, to take unawares.”² It is in the passive voice and thus carries the meaning of being “taken by surprise, seized unawares, or **entrapped**.”³

There are two ways of legitimately interpreting this word. It might mean that the person doing the sinning is overtaken and caught in the act by another *person*, and thus surprised and entrapped. Or it might mean that the person doing the sinning was overtaken and caught by the *sin* itself, thus surprised and entrapped. The context of what is happening in Galatia will help us understand which is the better interpretation.

It might be helpful to ask, “Why would Paul use this example?” Let’s recall what is happening in the churches in Galatia. False teachers have come in and subtly begun teaching that though faith in Jesus is **good, but it is not good enough** to be right with God. It’s great to believe in Jesus, but you must also keep the law of Moses and be circumcised. The churches are in the very process of embracing this kind of legalism (i.e. accepting the keeping of the law as the *means* of being accepted by God).

So what will happen in these churches when, assuming they are persuaded by Paul’s letter, which, according to Gal 5:10 is exactly what Paul believes will happen, they realize the error they have nearly embraced? We know not all of them have completely embraced the error because they have been arguing about this. This is probably what Paul was referring to in 5:15 when he mentioned that they were “biting and devouring” each other. So some have been arguing for rejecting the false teachers and some have been arguing in favor of embracing the false teaching, not because they are willingly rejecting Christ, but because they desire to be obedient to the law.

So how will they respond to each other in the end when they all become convinced of the truth? How will those who were “right” respond to those who were “wrong?” How will those who are “spiritual” respond to those who were *not* so spiritual and were persuaded by the legalistic message of the false teachers? Clearly it is a sin to embrace legalism. So how are those who did **not** “fall” into this sin (of embracing legalism) to respond to those who **did** fall into this sin?

Will those who were “right” subjugate those who were wrong? Will they say, “I told you so?” This is the critical question. Will these churches be torn apart by this or will they be strengthened? Will the ones who are “spiritual” restore those who have fallen? Or will they kick them out of the church because they were so easily led astray?

If the sin of being deceived by the false teachers informs Paul’s thinking, then the context clearly appears to point to an interpretation of being “**caught in a transgression**” as a person being caught not by another person, but by the Satanic subtlety of sin.

Paul is saying that anyone who has been entrapped and overtaken by the surprising power of the deceitfulness of sin, needs the help of fellow Christians in order to be restored. One commentator wrote that a better translation, might be “caught *by* a sin. The thought is that of someone running

² Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ga 6:1.

³ Richard N. Longenecker, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary : Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 272.

from sin but sin, being faster, overtakes and catches him.”⁴ This fits well with **Gal 5:7** as Paul writes, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”

The Galatians were moving right along in their spiritual growth, until they allowed these false teachers to have a platform for teaching what was not true. Then as they listened to the smooth talk of these silver tongued liars, they were deceived into accepting a false gospel and before they knew what was happening, they were being drawn away from obeying the truth.

This interpretation is further supported by the word translated “transgression.” The word (*paraptoma παραπτομα*) could be translated “‘fault.” The word means “to fall beside, a false step, a blunder, or a failure to achieve.”⁵ Sin is often much stronger than we first assume it to be and in our human weakness we get much too close to it and only too late discover that we do not have the power to resist the temptation. Then we find ourselves suddenly tripped up and entrapped by it.

Restore the Fallen One

Paul has a way for us to get out the mess and it is not by ourselves. The answer in those situations is that “those who are spiritual are restore” the fallen person. ***The one who has been tripped up needs to be helped up.*** He or she needs to be restored.

The word “restore” is used primarily in two ways. First, in secular Greek it is a “medical term used for setting a fractured bone.”⁶ This carries the idea that what is out of line, must set straight so that productive use may be restored after a time of healing.

The word is also used of fishing nets that have been broken and are in need of mending (Mt 4:21; Mk 1:19). A broken net will catch no fish, but a broken net that has been mended *can* be used to catch fish.

Sin weighs a person down with condemnation and guilt, which robs us from the joy of being used by God to build up and encourage others in the Lord. Sin results in pain and the need for support to strengthen that which has been wounded or broken. Sin is like a breaking or a tearing in the net our spiritual health. Sin is like a tear in the spiritual fibers of our soul.

Setting broken bones and mending torn nets both require the touch of someone’s hands (cf. Heb 12:12). Bones don’t heal properly with a guiding hand to set them straight. Nets do not mend themselves. *Those who have been entrapped by sin need those who are spiritual to come along side them and help them restore them to their former good state.*

Bear One Another’s Burdens

This is why Paul commands us to bear one another’s burdens.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Ga 6:1.

⁵ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ga 6:1.

⁶ Frank E. Gaebelin, Everett F. Harrison, W. Harold Mare et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans Through Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 501.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We tend to think of burdens as difficulties, or worries, or protracted trials. However, Paul here includes the sins that one has fallen into as among the burdens that we are to help one another bear. Kenneth Wuest writes, "The burdens in this context refer to the responsibility each saint should feel for the spiritual welfare of his fellow-saints, especially when they have sinned."⁷

"The principle would apply to all burdens, but the context has special reference to the heavy and oppressive weight of temptation and spiritual failure."⁸

Stop and Think

I wonder if we should stop for just a moment and ask ourselves if we think the same way Paul does? Do you think of someone else's moral lapse as a burden that you are to help bear? Or is it our default opinion to think, "Ha! He fell into sin all by himself and he can get himself out all by himself. He made his bed and now he can lay in it. She brought this on herself. That's her problem not mine." There may indeed be a time when someone needs to left alone to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, but not **all** the time.

There are some of us in this church who are really good at identifying the sins of other people and pointing them out while not being willing to lift one finger to help them out of the spiritual ditch in which they have landed. We are the ones of whom Jesus spoke. We offer long prescriptions of what one ought to do in this or that circumstance and yet we offer no help.

Matthew 23:4

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

In Crowd of the Caught Woman

If you were one among the crowd who awaited Jesus' verdict regarding the woman caught in the very act of adultery (Jn 8:2-11), would you be holding a rock ready to throw? Or would your hands be folded and your knees bent and trembling in broken-hearted prayer knowing that the only difference between you and her was that she got caught in her sin but you didn't get caught in yours? Remember that Jesus said you're guilty of adultery if all you do is just think about it.

I confess, when I hear that so-in-so has fallen into some sin, my first thought is not, "I need to help him bear this." I do not naturally think, "OK, he has fallen into sin and so I need help him out. I need to help him bear this burden." **I need to change the way I think.** When I discover that someone has been tripped up by the subtly of sin, I need to begin to ask the question, "Jesus, how do you want me to help? In what way can I help bear this burden?" Jesus would have us help restore the person trapped in sin to a mended and healed condition where that which was crooked has been put right.

It's None of My Business

If we would become the kind of church that Christ wants us to be, we must stop thinking, "I know so-in-so is sinning, but that's none of my business." The fact is, if he or she is a fellow Christian, it is

⁷ Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader*, Ga 6:2.

⁸ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Ga 6:2.

our business. Saying “it’s none of my business” is like saying to your neighbor who is diagnosed with cancer, “I know she has cancer, but that’s none of my business.”

If you knew a person in this church was diagnosed with cancer, would you not be willing to help bear that burden? Would you not be willing to take her to the doctor? Would you not be willing to cook a few meals? Would you not be willing to watch the kids? Or walk the dog? Or rake some leaves? Or clean the house? Sure, you would. Well then, how much worse is sin than cancer?

Not caring about a physical disease is bad enough, but not caring about spiritual disease is infinitely worse. If we can bear one another’s physical burdens, can we not, if we are truly loving one another like Jesus commanded, bear one another’s spiritual burdens?

Conclusion

How are we to do this? How are we to bear one another’s burdens? How are we to restore the one who has fallen? Paul explains there is a way that this is to be done.

1. **In A Spirit of Gentleness (Gal 6:1).** “... you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” One of the fruits of the Spirit is gentleness (5:23). A gentle spirit is a patient spirit. Yelling at a broken bone will not make it heal faster. So we need to consider carefully the words we use as we restore the one who has fallen.

- **Proverbs 15:4** *A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*
- Jesus is gentle. **Matthew 11:29** *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*
- Paul was gentle. **1 Thessalonians 2:7** *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.*
- Paul told Titus to remind the people of God “to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.” (**Titus 3:2**)
- James teaches the same truth. **James 3:17** *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*
- May the Lord grant us the ability to be gentle like Jesus was.

2. **In A Spirit of Humble Watchfulness.** Paul says “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1). While you are helping the one who has fallen, you must also keep your eyes upon your own heart. If we are helping someone we are never to think, “This will not happen to me.”

- **1 Cor 10:12** *“Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”*
- If we fail to “keep watch” on ourselves, then we will be tempted. If we think, “Ha! What an idiot! This could never happen to me.” Then Paul would warn, “Watch out!”
- **Proverbs 16:18** *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*
- God knows how to humble the haughty and bring low him who exalts himself. “God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble” (Jam 4:6; 1 Ptr 5:5).

- If you think you are something when you are nothing (Gal 6:3), God will be sure to reveal the true nature of things to you. Paul warns us in **Rom 12:3** that we are “*not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.*”
 - **Rom 12:16** *Never be conceited.*
 - Are you watching over your heart diligently? Is there any conceit in there? If so, root it out. Confess it and turn away from it by the help of God.
3. **In A Spirit of Self-Examination.** Verse 4 calls for each person to be the judge of his own work and not to wrongly compare himself with his neighbor. If we are also looking around at others to be the standard by which we measure our own conduct and spiritual growth, we are sure to fall into trouble.
- *Erring on the Positive.* If we compare ourselves with those with those who have fallen into the trap of sin, then we can falsely make ourselves look better than we are and we fall into the very trap that Paul is warning against. If we measure ourselves by the failings of others, we will have a falsely inflated view of ourselves.
 - *Erring on the Negative.* If we compare ourselves with others who are doing well spiritually and who are growing then we can have a false sense of our own potential for spiritual growth. If I compare myself with Dave Butters and say, “Man, I wish I could play guitar like him. If only I could play like Dave then I could really glorify God! But I can’t, so God will never use me to bring much glory to His name!”
 - “*We must each bear our own load*” (**Gal 6:5**). There is no contradiction with verse 2 here, since a different word is used in this verse. The word used in verse 2 refers to “heavy burdens that are more than a man should carry,” while in this verse the word means “a soldier’s pack.”⁹
 - God has given each of us our own measure of faith (Rom 12:3). God will only judge us based upon what we do with (the talents) what we have been given. God gives to one 10 talents, to another 5, and to another 1. We will each be judged based on what we do with those talents and treasures that God has given to us. God will not judge based upon the gifts and abilities he gave to Dave Butters. He will judge me based upon my use of the gifts and abilities that He has given to me. So my responsibility is to carry rightly the “pack” that God has given uniquely to me.
 - When I get I stuck in the mud, please help me out. While I’m struggling to get out, I’ll let you hold my pack. But once I’m out and all cleaned up, then you can give me back my pack and we’ll both continue on our journey.
 - There is a time for you to help me bear my burden, but there also comes a time when I need to carry my own pack.

The Law of Christ

Then, perhaps with a bit sarcastic tongue in cheek, Paul says that “bearing one another’s burdens is the fulfilling of the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Perhaps he threw this in for the legalists and the false teachers. It is almost as if he is saying, “OK, if you want a law to obey, obey this law: bear one

⁹ Frank E. Gaebelin, Everett F. Harrison, W. Harold Mare et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans Through Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 502.

another's burdens." How is this the law of Christ? Probably because of what Jesus told his disciples on His final night with them.

John 13:34

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.

Jesus was the supreme "burden bearer." He bore the burden of the sins of the whole world. And he has the audacity to tell us to do the same? Of course, he does not mean that we can pay for one another's sins. Only sinless Jesus is worthy to bear the penalty for our sins, but Jesus calls us to love one another in the same way that He loved us. Therefore, if I truly love my brother or sister, I will do all I can to help bear his or her burden.

We are a long way from doing this as it should be done. But are you willing to move in this direction?

If we are trusting Jesus to bear our burdens, can we not then be helpful in bearing another's burden? This is the main point of the sermon today. Jesus wants us to assist one another in bearing our burdens, which includes times when we are overtaken and caught up in slippery subtlety of sin. If you don't hear anything else I said this morning, hear this:

"Bear one another's burdens
and so fulfill the law of Christ."