

CARRYING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Galatians 6:1-5

Introduction:

In our study in Galatians we have spent many weeks looking at the error that was being brought into the Galatian churches. We have looked at Paul's dismay at their ignorance of the truth, and their willingness to set aside the gospel they had believed, and to put their confidence in self-effort.

In chapter 5 Paul shifted from the doctrinal/theological to the practical. As we live our lives in the freedom to which we have been called in Christ, what does that look like in everyday life? How do we live a life of freedom?

His answer to those questions could be summarized by looking at 5:13-14. As believers, we have been set free, free from our own selfish, self-serving desires, so that we can serve others in love.

In 5:16-26 Paul showed us the contrast between the life that is dominated by the flesh with its lusts and desires, and the life that is dominated or led by the Spirit of God. He points out the conflict that we have within us between the flesh and the Spirit, forces which are at odds with each other. The flesh continually pulls us toward that which pleases self, while the Spirit leads us to that which pleases God.

The way the flesh and the Spirit manifest themselves in a life is a marked contrast. The works of the flesh are self-centered, focused on the passions and lusts that appeal to the sinful nature. The fruit of the Spirit is God-centered, focused on the characteristics that bring pleasure and glory to God. We looked at those things so briefly last week. It is my hope that after we finish this final chapter of Galatians in a couple of weeks that we will then spend a few weeks looking at the fruit of the Spirit in more detail.

But Paul follows up that catalogue of spiritual qualities by encouraging us to keep in step with the Spirit – v. 25. The word means to “walk in line behind a leader.” We need to walk in the footsteps of the Spirit.

Well, that brings us to chapter 6, which is a further exposition of how the Spirit makes a difference in our lives. It affects our relationships. The Spirit of God fills us with a concern not only for our own life but also for our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

A Fellow Believer Caught in Sin

Read v. 1 – Here we have a critical situation. Someone's sin has come to light. The church body has become aware of a trespass. Maybe it's some kind of sexual sin. Perhaps a church member has been caught cheating on his taxes. Maybe it is a business man from the congregation who has been deceitful in his business dealings and it has just hit the front page of the local paper.

Paul says, “...if anyone is caught in any trespass...” (NIV – caught in a sin) The NKJV uses the word, “overtaken” which is defined as, “to take one by forestalling him *i.e.* before he can flee or conceal his crime.” His sinful nature has won the conflict in some area. He or she has yielded to the flesh rather than to the Spirit. But now he has been discovered. His sin is now public. What do you do?

Well, Paul says, “...you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” So who qualifies as spiritual? This is where it gets a bit messy. It is easy to say, that's not me. It should be up to the elders or the pastor, the “spiritual” leaders.

But that is not what Paul says. He is writing to the congregation in these churches. So who are the spiritual ones? We need to look at the context of this statement. The chapter divisions here tend to muddy the issue. Because someone has put a chapter division here we tend to see this as a whole new subject. But it isn't.

In the previous section, Paul was talking about the need to be living and walking by the Spirit. He spoke about the conflict between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. He spoke of the contrast between a life led by the Spirit of God and a life controlled by the flesh and the sinful nature.

If you follow the line of reasoning that Paul follows here, then it becomes clear that anyone who is walking by the Spirit fits into his de-

scription as, "...you who are spiritual..." What we really have here is the same contrast Paul has just described in the previous chapter. You have a brother who is yielding to the sinful nature, the flesh, and has been led into sin. And you have the one who is yielding to the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, and is growing in grace and faith.

If you have the Spirit of God in you and you are growing in your relationship with the Lord as you walk by the Spirit, then Paul says that you need to go to that erring brother in an effort to restore him.

And there is the key, my friends. "...you who are spiritual should restore him..." It is so easy to judge an erring brother or sister, assuming that we know their motives or their thoughts. But when we take that approach we are not doing what Paul instructed us to do in this passage.

F.B. Meyer once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are three things we do not know:

- First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin.
- Second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her.
- Third, we also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

When we take those factors into account it changes our perspective. So what we need to do is to approach the erring brother with a couple of thoughts in mind.

- First, our goal is not to punish or ostracize or belittle the errant one for their sin. The goal is always restoration. We want to see them return to the relationship with the Lord that they once enjoyed when they were walking by the Spirit.
- Second, we go with the realization that we too are subject to temptation and sin. If I feel that I am better than the erring brother because I would never do that, I have lost sight of the depth of human depravity.

Paul says – "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." The same thought or idea is repeated several times in this short passage.

There are a whole series of yellow lights warning of danger if we are not alert. Look at v. 3 – read and comment. Then look briefly at v. 4 – read it. The warning is clear. Never become cocky or self-assured. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 – "But by the grace of God I am what I am..."

Whenever we encounter a fellow believer caught up in sin, let us never think that we are above doing such a thing. We must always realize that I could be there too, but for the grace of God.

Caring for One Another

Well, we need to look at another aspect of this concept of restoring a believer caught in sin. That has to do with caring for one another by carrying or bearing the burdens of others.

Read v. 2 – It is so easy to look at others, weighed down with burdens and afflictions, and become vindictive and judgmental toward them. In my daily Bible reading I am currently working through the book of Job. There was a man burdened down beyond comprehension. And how did his so-called friends respond? Did they help to bear his burden? No, they said, he had it coming. He deserves what he is getting. He must have done some incredible evil for all of this to come upon him.

Paul says, help your fellow traveler to carry the burden that is weighing him down. Add your shoulder to help carry his excruciating weight. You may feel that you have enough to deal with, but God calls us to bear the burdens of others.

I found an interesting story, which I think speaks to this admonition in a very moving way.

THE PERIL OF NO BURDEN

Shortly after coming to Christ, Sadhu Sundar, a Hindu convert to Christ, felt called to become a missionary to India. Late one afternoon Sadhu was traveling on foot through the Himalayas with a Buddhist monk. It was bitterly cold and the wind felt like sharp blades slicing into Sadhu's skin. Night was approaching fast when the monk warned Sadhu that they were in danger of freezing to death if they did not reach the monastery before darkness fell.

Just as they were traversing a narrow path above a steep cliff, they heard a cry for help. Down the cliff lay a man, fallen and badly hurt. The monk looked at Sadhu and said, "Do not stop. God has brought this man to

his fate. He must work it out for himself." The he quickly added while walking on, "Let us hurry on before we, too, perish." But Sadhu replied, "God has sent me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him."

The monk continued trudging off through the whirling snow, while the missionary clambered down the steep embankment. The man's leg was broken and he could not walk. So Sadhu took his blanket and made a sling of it and tied the man on his back. Then, bending under his burden, he began a body-torturing climb. By the time he reached the narrow path again, he was drenched in perspiration.

Doggedly, he made his way through the deepening snow and darkness. It was all he could do to follow the path. But he persevered, though faint with fatigue and overheated from exertion. Finally he saw ahead the lights of the monastery.

Then, for the first time, Sadhu stumbled and nearly fell. But not from weakness. He had stumbled over an object lying in the snow-covered road. Slowly he bent down on one knee and brushed the snow off the object. It was the body of the monk, frozen to death.

Years later a disciple of Sadhu's asked him, "What is life's most difficult task?" Without hesitation Sadhu replied: "To have no burden to carry."

You see, helping to carry the burden of another is not only for his benefit but for ours as well. It builds and strengthens, benefits and preserves us in our walk with God as well.

Being Self-focused in the Right Way

One more area we must quickly look at. Read vv. 4-5.

Is there a place for focusing on ourselves? Paul indicates that in the midst of this process of assisting others with their burdens, and restoring others, we need to be aware of our own calling and responsibilities.

"Let each test his own work..." MacArthur points out that the word literally means, "to approve something after testing it." Believers first must be sure their lives are right with God before giving spiritual help to others. "...reason to boast..." If a believer rejoices or boasts, it should be only boasting in the Lord for what God has done in him, not for what he supposedly has accomplished compared to other believers.

Then v. 5 – "...each will have to bear his own load." This sounds like a contradiction to verse 2. However, there are two very different words used. In verse 2 the idea is that of a crushing burden. A person is being weighed down by a heaviness that is beyond their own ability to bear.

We are to assist such a person, by helping them to bear that burden or weight that has come upon them.

In verse 5 the word that is used speaks of the obligations Christ lays upon his followers. It is used to refer to the lading or cargo of a ship. The idea, as Paul uses it, is the responsibilities or obligations that have been placed upon us by Christ. We are not to shirk our duties or to try to pass off to others what God has called us to do.

And that, by the way, would include restoring a fallen or wayward brother or sister.

Conclusion

So, to try to summarize what we have said this morning:

- When we see a brother in Christ, overtaken by a sin, we are called to restore such a person. We do not need some kind of super-spiritual standing or a certain position to qualify for this task. We simply need to be allowing the Spirit of God to lead and direct our lives.
- While doing this, we need to be aware of our own weakness and susceptibility to temptation.
- We must test our own lives by God's standards, not by comparison with others. As one speaker says, "Don't measure your moral achievements by those of others; measure them, test them, by the laws of Christ. Then whatever there is in you to boast about will not be owing to another's inferiority."
- Bear your own load. When we stand before God, we will answer for our own responsibilities and obligations.

May we always be willing to be used by God to help to restore a brother who has been caught in his sin. But in doing so may we never become proud of our own position or character.

I pray that, as a church family, we would be a people whose hatred of sin and love for sinners results in a community that denounces sin, but lovingly corrects and restores those who stray, being always mindful that it is only by God's grace that any of us can stand before God.