

One Another

Lesson 6: Bear One Another's Burdens -- Galatians 6:1-5

Picture a man stumbling along a mountain trail with a pack far too heavy for him. His knees buckle, his breath comes in gasps, and you can see he is about to go down. Now imagine you are walking the same trail with two very different friends. The first friend points and says, "Look at him, he should have packed lighter," and walks on. The second friend stops, crouches down, lifts part of the load onto his own shoulders, and walks beside the struggling man until the hard stretch is behind them. Galatians 6 is about which kind of friend the gospel makes us into. Paul has just warned against biting and devouring one another. Now he shows us the better way: bearing one another's burdens.

Paul opens with a hard case, not an easy one. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently." He does not say, if someone has a flat tire or a bad week. He says, if someone is caught in a sin, trapped, overtaken, ensnared. The flesh in us wants to do anything but draw near to such a person. We want to gossip about him, distance ourselves from him, or quietly enjoy feeling more righteous than him. Paul says: restore him. The word he uses was used for setting a broken bone or mending a torn net. Gentle, skilled, patient work that puts something broken back together.

And then Paul slips in a warning that should keep every restorer humble. "Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." The one who goes to lift a fallen brother had better keep one eye on his own footing, because the same trail is slippery for everyone. There is no platform above the struggle from which we minister down to lesser people. We are all on the same mountain. "Carry each other's burdens," Paul says, "and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ. The pattern of the One who bore our burdens all the way to a cross now becomes the pattern for how we treat each other.

But Paul will not let us turn burden-bearing into an excuse for laziness or pride either. In the same breath he says, "each one should carry their own load." At first that sounds like a contradiction. Bear one another's burdens, yet carry your own load? It is not a contradiction; it is wisdom. There are crushing burdens we were never meant to carry alone, and there are responsibilities before God that no one can carry for us. The mature Christian knows the difference. He runs to help his brother with the one, and he refuses to dodge his own accountability with the other. This lesson is about learning to do both.

Group Discussion: Why is it so much easier to talk about a fallen brother or sister than to go to them gently and try to restore them? What is it in us that prefers distance and judgment to the hard work of restoration?

Personal Reflection: Is there someone in your church family right now who is struggling under a heavy burden or caught in a sin, whom you have been keeping at a safe distance? What would it cost you to draw near?

Read Galatians 6:1-5

Study Questions

1. Paul says, “if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently” (v. 1). What does it tell us about God’s heart toward his straying children that the goal is restoration rather than rejection?
2. Be honest about your instinct when you learn a fellow Christian has fallen into sin. Does your heart move toward gossip and distance, or toward gentle restoration? What does your honest answer reveal?
3. Paul warns the would-be restorer, “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (v. 1). Why does Paul attach a warning about our own vulnerability to the work of restoring others, and what does it teach us about ourselves?
4. When you consider correcting or restoring someone, how aware are you of your own capacity to fall? Where might pride be hiding in the way you view people who have stumbled?
5. Paul says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (v. 2). What is “the law of Christ,” and how does carrying one another’s burdens fulfill it?

6. Think of a heavy burden you are carrying right now, perhaps in silence. Why is it so hard to let your brothers and sisters help carry it, and what would it look like to let them?
7. Paul says, "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves" (v. 3). How does an inflated view of ourselves make us unable to bear one another's burdens, and what is the cure for self-deception?
8. Where are you tempted to think of yourself as "something," more spiritual, more capable, or more deserving, than the people around you? How has that self-image kept you from humbly serving them?
9. Hold together the two commands that seem to collide: "carry each other's burdens" (v. 2) and "each one should carry their own load" (v. 5). How do mutual burden-bearing and personal accountability before God fit together rather than cancel each other out?
10. Look back across Galatians 6:1-5 as a whole: gentle restoration, watchful humility, mutual burden-bearing, and personal responsibility. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow through this passage, and what you will do about it.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: James 5:19-20, where turning a sinner from the error of his way saves a soul from death and covers a multitude of sins; Matthew 18:15-17, where Jesus teaches

us to go to an erring brother privately and seek to win him; Romans 15:1-3, where the strong are to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please themselves, following Christ; Romans 14:12, where each of us will give an account of himself to God; Isaiah 53:4-6, where the Suffering Servant bears our griefs and carries our sorrows.