

The Body of Christ

Lesson 9: Bearing One Another's Burdens -- Galatians 6:1-10

There is an old story about a man who slips and falls into a deep hole and cannot climb out. A doctor walks by, and the man calls up for help; the doctor writes a prescription, tosses it down, and moves on. A religious man walks by; he says a prayer and keeps going. Then a friend walks by, and to the man's horror, the friend jumps down into the hole with him. "Why did you do that?" the man cries. "Now we are both stuck." And the friend says, "Yes, but I have been down here before, and I know the way out." That is what it means to bear a burden. Not to shout instructions from the top. To climb down into the hole.

Paul ends his letter to the Galatians with exactly this kind of love. He has spent five chapters defending the gospel of grace against those who wanted to load people down with rules. And now, having freed them from the crushing burden of trying to earn God's favor, he turns and shows them what to do with their freedom: use it to carry one another. "Bear one another's burdens," he says, "and so fulfill the law of Christ."

It is a strikingly down-to-earth vision of church life. Paul talks about catching a brother in a sin and gently restoring him. He talks about watching your own heart so that you are not tempted too. He talks about the burdens we carry and the loads each of us must bear, about not growing weary in doing good, about doing good to everyone, and especially to the family of faith. This is not church as a weekly event. This is church as a community of people who actually carry each other through life.

And notice what Paul says it adds up to: "so fulfill the law of Christ." The whole law of Christ, Paul says elsewhere, is summed up in loving your neighbor as yourself. When you climb down into someone's hole, when you gently lift a fallen brother, when you refuse to grow weary in doing good, you are not just being nice. You are fulfilling the deepest law of the kingdom. This lesson is about that costly, beautiful work of burden-bearing love, and about whether the church will be a place where it actually happens.

Group Discussion: Most of us have been through a hard season, an illness, a loss, a crisis. Think about who showed up for you and who did not. What did the people who truly helped actually do, and what made their help different from good intentions that never went anywhere?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself: when you become aware that someone in the church is struggling, what is your usual response, do you move toward them, or quietly hope someone else will handle it? What do you think drives that response?

Read Galatians 6:1-10

Study Questions

1. Paul says, “if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (v. 1). What does this command reveal about how the church is meant to respond to a member who falls into sin, and why is the goal restoration rather than condemnation or mere tolerance?

2. Paul tells those who help a fallen brother to “keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (v. 1). When you become aware of someone else’s failure, are you more tempted toward harsh judgment or toward a quiet pride that thinks it could never happen to you? How does honest awareness of your own weakness change the way you would help?

3. Paul says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (v. 2). What is “the law of Christ,” and why does Paul say that carrying each other’s burdens is how we fulfill it? What does this teach about what God most wants to see in His church?

4. Burden-bearing requires both the humility to carry others and the humility to let yourself be carried. Which is harder for you, drawing near to help someone else, or admitting your own burden and letting others help you? Why?

5. Paul gives what sounds like a paradox: “bear one another’s burdens” (v. 2), yet “each will have to bear his own load” (v. 5). How do these two fit together, and what does it teach us about the balance between mutual care in the body and personal responsibility before God?

6. Paul warns against self-deception: “if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (v. 3). Where might pride or self-sufficiency be keeping you from the humble work of burden-bearing, either by making you feel above it or by making you unwilling to be helped?
7. Paul says, “let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (v. 9). Why does Paul assume that doing good will tend to make us weary, and what does he offer to sustain us in the long, often unrewarded work of loving and serving others?
8. Think of an area where you have grown weary in doing good, where serving, helping, or loving someone has worn you down. What is feeding that weariness, and how might Paul’s promise of a harvest “in due season” renew you?
9. Paul commands, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (v. 10), and he frames the whole passage as fulfilling the law of Christ through burden-bearing love. Why does Paul give a special priority to doing good within the family of faith, and what does it say about a congregation if its members do not actually bear one another’s burdens? How central is this kind of practical love to what the church is meant to be?
10. Look back across Galatians 6:1–10. Having seen that the church is meant to be a community that gently restores, carries burdens, and does not grow weary in doing good, name one specific burden God is calling you to help carry, or one you need to let others help you carry, and what is the first step?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 13:34-35, love one another as I have loved you, the mark of My disciples; Romans 15:1-2, the strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak; James 5:19-20, whoever brings back a sinner saves his soul from death; Romans 12:13,15, contribute to the needs of the saints, weep with those who weep; 1 John 3:16-18, lay down our lives for the brothers, loving in deed and truth.