

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 21 – “Bearing the Load”
Galatians 6:1-5

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The first paragraph of this last chapter of Galatians focuses on the responsibility of the responsibility of the Christian. Throughout the letter the apostle has been concerned with the doctrinal safety of the church. Those who had come into the church with the emphasis of Judaism had certainly done a great deal to place these young Christian into bondage. Paul comes with a message of freedom. It is freedom from the law, freedom from sin, and freedom from death. It is very easy for us to see that he is also concerned that they not pendulum swing in their theology. For Paul, the best measure of safety to prevent the Galatians from becoming licentious after their experience with the bondage of the law was in their understanding this principle.

TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

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. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. (Galatians 6:1-5 ESV).

There are many times that we face questions about life. Some of these are general questions about the fabric and face of life. These may be contemplative and deeply philosophical, much as they were for the writer of Ecclesiastes. But, there are other questions that directly bring us to a point of introspection, a time of looking deep within the recesses of our lives in order to know who and what we are in the midst of life. It is the latter of these two types of questions that I would like us to begin with today.

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU HEAR THE WORDING OF THE QUESTION. *What have you done today, or even this week, that only a Christian could do?* Notice that I didn't ask you to recount those times when you did something that anyone could do; or, even to list those things you shouldn't have done. All of us have a long list of those things. This question deals with those things that **ONLY** a born-again believer, a child of God could do. The answer will tell us a great deal about how we find ourselves in relation to our responsibility as Christians. Responsibility always comes with spiritual privilege. It is surely a privilege to have the Holy Spirit living in your life, and to be able to walk in His strength each day. It is a privilege that has been given to us by a loving and gracious heavenly Father. **But let me be very quick to say that it is a privilege that comes with some very specific responsibility.**

In some translations verses two and five at first appear to be a contradiction of principles. In the English Standard Version we have a clear translation. Paul writes, *Bear on another's burdens* in verse 2, and then he writes in verse 5, *but let each one test his own work*. That there is a connection with our spiritual walk and journey is very clear in his use of the word "spiritual" in verse one. These are those walking in the strength that the Holy Spirit provides for every believer day by day. To be spiritual a person **DOES NOT** get out of life. The Holy Spirit lives with you in the midst of life. That is why the apostle addresses these words to those who

are “spiritual, in Christ, born-again, a Christian, these words are for you also. ***We are to be burden bearers, we are to bear the load.***

First, the Spiritual Should Bear the Load of the Fallen Brother (vv. 1-2).

Since the apostle begins this verse with the familiar term, *brothers*, we can easily understand that he is talking to the family. This admonition of Paul is not to strangers, it is a family matter. The man who is fallen is a brother in the Christian family. This brother has been discovered in an embarrassing situation.

To fully understand this we must look at two specific words. First, look at the word *fault*. It is the Greek word for “trespass.” This individual has been found in an unlawful matter; he has trespassed and been caught. Second, the word *caught* literally means “overtaken.” It certainly means you have come up on this brother in the midst of a trespass. You have caught him “red-handed.” Now, the question is naturally “What do we do now?” The basic command is ***to restore such a one.*** The term “restore” was borrowed by Paul from the medical vocabulary of his day. It was used of a physician setting a broken bone. It was also used in the common language of fishermen mending a net. The basic responsibility of the Christian when he finds a brother in sin is to be redemptive, to be corrective. Everything he has to do should have the good of the brother in view. The goal is restoration to the fellowship with the Lord that is his birthright. **There are two important principles:**

1. ***Such a ministry is to be done in a spirit of meekness.*** This means that a spirit of submissiveness and patience will prevail. Usually our first reaction with a brother who makes a mistake in life, a sin in life, is to become angry with that brother especially if it is a sin against us. Our temptation is to berate them, to chastise them, or even to judge them. Meekness is just the opposite of this. ***We are told to restore such a brother in a spirit of meekness. It is restoration of such a brother in kindness and gentleness that we are called to do. Then we can be like the physician who seeks to set the broken bone with as little damage as possible to the other parts of the body. That’s bearing the load. Is that how you’ve reacted to those you have found to be in error?***
2. ***Such a ministry is to be done in a spirit of careful consideration of oneself.*** Look at verse one again: ***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.*** We are to restore the fallen brother knowing full well that we are capable of the same sin. Our spirituality does not give us immunity from falling into sin. After all, we ***ARE sinners. We may not have fallen into the same trap as our brother, but we are the same in nature.*** We are sinners saved by the grace of God.

You may have visited Niagara Falls. Mary and I have been there. One of the highlights of our visit was to hear the roar of the water as it cascaded over the fall. There are many vantage points from which you can view the falls. One of these is found along a guided tour through caves dug through the solid rock beneath the falls. We took the tour and as we made our way down some stairs and then an elevator for a 100 foot drop in elevation we were told to robe ourselves from head to toe in yellow rubber rain gear. I remember telling Mary we wouldn’t really need them. Boy was I wrong! The deeper we traveled through the tunnels and out to a place beside the falls the mist from the falls drifted in and covered us with water! We made our way to another spot where a small

opening and guardrail had been erected. You could see and almost reach the water as it fell from the top and plunged to the pool below. It was a thunderous roar and a splash of mist and spray. If you would have disregarded the guardrail and stepped into the falls you would have been crushed immediately by over a million gallons of water!

LISTEN, WATCH THIS... Though I was in a position of seeming great anger, I was perfectly safe since the water merely passed over me. That's the picture of the grace of God. When you begin to feel as though you are somehow better than the fallen brother, remember it is by the grace of God that you are safe. Our task is to restore in that spirit of meekness and humility.

Second, the Spiritual Are to Bear the Load of Individual Duty (vv. 4-5).

One of the great temptations of the Christian is to compare. We are tempted to measure our spirituality or dedication against our brother. Whenever you encounter a brother with some obvious failure in his life, you are tempted to strain your arm bending it around to pat yourself on the back! You reason, "Well, compared to him, I'm a pretty good Christian." And, compared with some you are a pretty good Christian. You may pray more than they do. You may witness more than they do. You may know more about the Bible than they do. You've never been guilty of the things they have been caught red-handed doing. However, you are missing one key ingredient in this line of reasoning. Typically when we follow this line of reasoning we pick the weakest of believers. And we forget that God does not compare us with each other. He measures us against his ideal, the Lord Jesus Christ!

So Paul says, *For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work* and then, *For each will have to bear his own load.* "Load" is a word also translated "burden." It literally means "pack." It refers to the military pack a soldier carried while marching. It was also used of the cargo of a ship. The basic idea is that a Christian has been given a cargo of responsibility to carry. **Our basic concern must be how well we are doing with our cargo. When I stand before the Lord he will not hold me responsible for my brother's cargo, but for mine.**

Jesus emphasized this. In his memorable meeting with Peter after his resurrection he applied this principle. After confronting Peter with his need for love and charging him with the responsibility of feeding the sheep, he indicated there would be some difficult days ahead for him. He would suffer confinement and even death for his faith. Just as Jesus revealed this to Peter, John walked by and Peter asked about the fate and future of John. **Jesus said:**

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" (John 21:20-22 ESV).

Please hear me well. Walking in the Spirit does not mean walking irresponsibly. That is heresy. All of us have encountered people who are so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly good! Paul does not approve of such behavior. Walking in the Spirit means we take seriously the bearing of our load.

I have often been accused of having been born about 100 years too late. I love the old west, or at least Hollywood's version of it. There is a certain mystique about it all to me. There is a good lesson to be learned from one of the common modes of transportation from that era. The stagecoach was a primary means of travel for many people. When a man undertook a journey by stagecoach he would have first purchased a ticket. He was then informed that there were first, second, and third class passengers. Now, if you've ever seen the inside of a stagecoach, you know that every seat looks alike, as it did to the ordinary passenger.

Often the novice passenger would purchase the less expensive third class seat thinking there was no difference. All would go great until the coach would approach the bottom of a steep hill. The driver would stop the coach and announce, "First class passengers keep your seats. Second class passengers get out and walk. Third class passengers get out and push!"

Well, can I first say to you that none of us has purchased our own ticket. Jesus did that. And further, can I also say that for some of us he purchased first class tickets, others second class tickets, and for some third class tickets. Some of us will be called on to sit back and ride to the top. Others will need to get out and walk. And some of us will need to get out and push. There is no honor more for one of the tickets over the other. They are just different.

When we can accept that truth, then we can bear one another's burdens!