

Text: **Galatians 6:2**

Bear One Another's Burdens

As deer help one another swim, as birds help one another fly, as stones carry one another in buildings, so Christians are to help one another fight sin and live for Christ. (Meyer's Commentary) This is the law of Christ. As we hear God's Word in Galatians 6:2, in its larger context, may Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit help us fulfill the law of Christ.

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Here is a clear command for Christians, but what does it mean?

First, let us understand that this is our SPIRITUAL calling as believers

Bear one another's burdens has often been understood in a very general way of helping fellow believers when they are suffering from sickness, financial hardship or from some other trial that the Lord has placed on their pathway. And surely it is the calling of believers to help one another through hardships. But the context of Galatians 6:2 shows that the Lord is calling us to something more specific than this. He is calling us as believers to help each other stand up again after we fall into sin. When a brother or sister stumbles 绊倒 spiritually or morally, in doctrine or in life, we should not leave that person alone to solve his own problems. We should show love by helping him get up and walk again in the way of Christ.

Our Bibles are divided by chapter numbers and headings (such as the heading above Galatians 6:1, "Bear and Share the Burdens"), but the original Greek has none of these. We must understand that there is a clear connection between Galatians 6:2 and what comes before in Galatians 5 – the 'holy war' against the 'works of the flesh' (the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21), and the call to walk in the way of the Spirit (see the 'fruit of the Spirit' listed in Galatians 5:22-23). **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited 自负, provoking one another, envying one another.** (Galatians 5:25-26)

Sadly, as Christians who belong to Jesus Christ by faith, there are times when we do not walk by faith. We do not follow the Holy Spirit's directions in Scripture. There are times (too many of them!) when we listen to the voice of sin within us telling us that, for our own safety and well-being, we really need to follow sin. This can happen to us even if we have been growing in grace and making good progress in our spiritual journey. We can become careless in watching our own hearts. We can take past victories as guarantees of the future ones. It is very easy for Christians, *any* Christian, to stumble.

This is what Paul is addressing in the verse just before the call to **bear one another's burdens: Brethren, if any man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.** (Galatians 6:1) This verse helps us understand what it means to bear one another's burdens – if *someone is overtaken by a trespass, you who are spiritual should go to him and restore him in a spirit of gentleness*. To be **overtaken** means that sin took you by surprise when your guard was down, so that you lashed out 抨击 too harshly against someone or something that upset you, or you let yourself become a follower of a dynamic TV preacher who teaches the lie that if you believe in Jesus like you should you will not become sick and you will not have financial hardships, or you followed your lusts into websites that are indecent 下流 and pornographic 色情, or you are letting minor issues keep you away from the gathering of your church family on the Lord's Day.

In other words, the **burdens** Christians need help with are sin burdens which are heavy weights that crush people so that they fall and cannot get up without help. They need help from fellow Christians to have the sin-burden removed so they can be renewed in their 'walk in the Spirit' again.

Another aspect of the spiritual nature of this calling to bear one another's burdens is that it is **those who are spiritual** who are specially called to this task. What does it mean to be a spiritual person? It does not refer to a person who claims to be gifted in speaking in tongues, or someone who is really 'good' at religious talk. From the context of the work of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 we know this means a person in whom the fruit of the Spirit has taken hold and is growing. A spiritual person

is a sinner who has come to Jesus for forgiveness and new life. Jesus has entered that sinner's life and now that saved sinner is following the good commandments 命令 of the Holy Spirit rather than the deadly commandments of sin. The spiritual man is still a sinner who has to wrestle against 'the works of the flesh' everyday, but, by God's grace he is walking in the Spirit and must see it as his calling also to help his fellow Christians fight their sins and walk in the Spirit.

Secondly, let us understand that this calling requires much HUMILITY

When you help a brother or sister bear his sin-burden, you must **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.** (Galatians 6:1). We must approach a fallen fellow believer with gentleness and humility. **Bearing one another's burdens** then requires the following in us:

a) **EMPATHY** or **SYMPATHY**: To **bear one another's burdens** involves feeling *sympathy* for that person in the guilt and shame that he feels. We must **consider ourselves** that we can also be tempted and fall into the very same sin. Rather than come down on the fallen one from *above* as someone who is *better*, we must walk *beside* him as a fellow *sinner*. We must approach him in an understanding way – understanding the nature of *sin* and of *falling* into sin, but also knowing the *power* of Christ to overcome sin and the patient, practical steps which are necessary for doing so. One commentator explains bearing one another's burdens this way: it is the *mutual, loving participation in another's feeling of guilt*, a weeping with those that weep in a *moral* point of view, and in so doing you lighten the pressure of guilt and shame. (Meyer) Such a person must be picked up and be reminded of the mercy of God toward every sinner who repents and be helped to renewed assurance of faith.

b) **GENTLENESS**: What is your response when a brother or sister steps into a sin trap? Do you stay far away and let him carry his burden alone, quietly *condemning* him for being so foolish? Do you *gossip* 闲话 about that person and make his failure your source of entertainment? Do you *trample* 践踏 on that person by being severe? Or do you go to that person and offer a helping hand? Oh, there is a time to be severe when a person loves his sin and does not want to leave it and rejects your help. But this is not the situation of which Paul is speaking. He is speaking of an early encounter with someone who has been overtaken. Our first encounters must be gentle, and all encounters with him after that too, as long as that person demonstrates a willingness to take our hand and be restored.

Paul speaks of the way he suffered with the people of God when they failed: 2 Cor. 11:29 *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant* 我不焦急呢? This does not mean he was indignant and harsh toward the fallen one, but about the power and attractiveness of sin to pull us into its trap. John Calvin says: *While you must administer the vinegar of reproof, don't forget to mix oil in the vinegar* – that is, the soft, soothing oil of gentleness!

c) **CAUTION**: Approaching a fallen brother in Christ humbly requires caution. **Consider yourselves lest you also be tempted.** (Galatians 6:1) Let his sin be a reminder to me that I am prone 倾向于 to be caught in such a sin. I should not gawk or gasp at him as if it's unbelievable, but mourn like it could have happened to me. One of the Church Fathers, Bernard, said when he was informed that a brother had fallen into adultery: "He fell yesterday; I may fall today." (The Lives of Our Fathers). The Church Father Augustine said "There is no sin which one person has committed, that another person may not commit it also." We stand in slippery places. In his commentary John Trapp mentions a famous church leader who said: *When I hear of someone doing good, I pray that I might have more of that good, and when I hear of someone falling, I pray that it will not fall likewise.*

In summary, Martin Luther gives us good practical advice about the humble manner in which we are to bear one another's burdens:

"If any man be overtaken with a fault, do not aggravate 加重 his grief, do not scold him, do not condemn him, but lift him up and gently restore his faith. If you see a brother despondent over a sin he has committed, run up to him, reach out your hand to him, comfort him with the Gospel and embrace him like a mother. When you meet a willful sinner who does not care, go after him and rebuke him sharply." (Commentary on Galatians)

Thirdly, the task of bearing one another's burdens is not an option; it is the law of Christ.

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2) What is the law of Christ that we must fulfill? Again, we don't have to go far to find the answer. In Galatians 5:13-14 Paul writes: **For you, brethren, have been called to liberty自由; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.** This is the law of Christ which governs our Christian freedom. When we put our trust in Jesus, He sets us free from the guilt of sin and from the addiction of loving ourselves and living for ourselves and ignoring the needs of others. He sets us free to love one another deeply, from the heart.

(This does not mean that the command to love your neighbor is greater than the command to love God, for loving your neighbor is the way we prove that we really do love God above all – see I John 4:19-21)

Love means laying down your life for another, sacrificing your time, energy, money and comfort-level to help another in the name of Christ. Jesus said: **This is my commandment: that you love one another; as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.** (John 13:34-35) How did Jesus love us? While we were still sinners, He died for us. He paid dearly for our restoration. He took the eternal punishment of God we deserved for our sins so that we could have our sin-burden removed. Jesus Christ is the great burden-bearer: **Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.** (Isaiah 53.4,6; see also Matthew 11:28-30)

As Christians we are called now to thank Jesus for His costly重价, burden-bearing love for us, and witness to His great love by imitating His love. That is what we are doing when we bear one another's burdens. Christ's love for us becomes the law of Christ in our relationship with one another. No, we can never offer to a brother or sister the same love Christ offered to us. When we love a brother by bearing his sin-burden we can never *pay* for that sin. Only Jesus can do that. And we can never *uproot* the power of that sin. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But we can and must show to others what Christ has done for us by taking them by the hand and leading them to the power of the cross of Christ for forgiveness of sin and to the power of the Holy Spirit to rise up from that sin.

Let us imitate and glorify Jesus Christ by bearing one another's burdens! This is our glorious task as Christians rescued from our sin-burden by Christ the great burden-bearer. When Galatians 6:5 says that **each one shall bear his own load** it is not contradicting verse 2 which says that we must **bear one another's burdens**. The 'load' of verse 5 is not the same as the 'burdens' of verse 2. Your '**load**' means your **task** and **responsibility** as a Christian before the Lord. We each have our own task of serving one another and should not pass it off to others because we're too busy or too afraid.

Conclusion

Bearing one another's burdens is a very important part of the development of a Christian's faith. One commentator writes: *If we obeyed this apostolic instruction as we should, much unkind gossip would be avoided, more serious backsliding would be prevented, the good of the church advanced, and the name of Christ glorified.* (John Stott)

This is what it means to walk in the Spirit: not to be **conceited** toward one another, **provoke one another**, or **envy one another** (Galatians 5:26); but to **bear one another's burdens** (Galatians 6:2). Let us with joy and thanksgiving fulfill the law of Christ!