**New Hope Global Sermon - Bear One Another’s Burdens**



**Introduction:**

Research and personal experience tells us that one of the repeated fallouts from the 3+ year Covid global pandemic is loneliness, isolation, a loss of community, belonging and affirmation. With the repeated lock-downs and the stress that results, people have gotten shut in to their own thoughts and perception without the balance and truths from a wider perspective. Often that has added to their loneliness and created distortions about who God is, who they are as individuals and how they are supposed to be connected to God’s family of believers around the world.

The stress and insecurities of the future plus the great restrictions on travel have multiplied people’s need to experience genuine caring community. One remedy for this malaise is to focus again on the “one anothers” in the New Testament: love one another, honor one another(Rom.1210, edify one another (Rom 14:19, I Thes.5:11) admonish one another (Rom.15:14). Practice hospitality toward one another ( Rom.12:13), 1 Pet.4:9) forbear one another in love (Eph.4:2), be kind to one another, forgive one another, (Eph.4:32, Col.3:13), comfort one another (1 Thes. 4:18, 2 Cor.2: 3), exhort one another (Heb.10:25, Heb.3:13), confess your sins to one another, pray for one another (Jam.5:16) and bear one another’s burdens (Gal.6:2).

This last admonition is our theme for the sermon this week. In my own experience with Keith’s Alzheimers I have been particularly blessed by those who have helped me in this way these last months - many of them through zoom connections. Fulfilling these directives can return us to a new engagement in caring Christian community- a great need in our suffering world.

**Gal.6:2: *Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.***

The larger context of this admonition is the strife and party spirit in the Galatian church. In many ways that negative context in Galatia parallels the negative context we experience (for very different reasons) in 2022. In Galatians 6:1-10 Paul frames this admonition within 2 sets of seeming opposites – first, personal responsibility and mutual accountability, and second, the law of Moses and the law of Christ. As we examine those differing approaches to Christian living and to the Scripture, the meaning of Gal.6:2 will be clearer.

First, personal responsibility vs. mutual accountability. Scripture teaches both. Christians have a personal responsibility for the godliness of their own lives – they are to watch out for temptation in their lives (Gal.6:1), being careful not to ‘sow to please their sinful nature for that leads to destruction. But they are also to live in mutual accountability and caring – bearing one another’s burdens and “as we have opportunity doing good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal.6:8,10). In mutual accountability, we learn to lean into a love that binds us together through the one anothers. As the Spirit leads us into these areas of mutual care, it can lift our flagging spirits, give new purpose to our lives even when we feel isolated in quarantine, and reflect the Lord. It is a balm in Gilead.

**The law of Christ**

To fulfill this principle of mutual accountability, Paul invokes the law of Christ. He says that we bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Scot McKnight, the commentator for the *NIV Application Bible Commentary on Galatians,* clarifies the application of the two laws - the law of Moses and the law of Christ.

“The expression “law of Christ” is surprising in its formulations since Paul has spent a great deal of time dismissing the law as the Christian’s guide; Nonetheless, his willingness to say Christians are under the “law of Christ” and not under the “law of Moses is entirely reasonable, once we understand that “law of Christ” is nothing other than (1) submission to the teachings of Jesus that fulfill the law (Mt. 5:17-20) and (2) life in the Spirit which is essentially love and which itself fulfills the law of Moses (Gal. 5:6, 14, 18, 22). . .

A specific example of following the law of Christ is to carry the burden of a brother or sister. Paul is here addressing those who are restoring and so we must envision the restorer as a person who undertakes not only to point out problems and sins, but also to carry the responsibility of helping that person become free of that entanglement. Here we find Paul’s theme of mutual accountability. . . The Christian approaches the sister “in the Spirit of gentleness and does whatever he or she can, and so works through the problem with that sister until she learns to “live in the Spirit.”

The principle, then, of restoration, is loving one another. Christians are responsible for one another and because of the love of God that comes to them through the Spirit, they carry one another’s burdens when those burdens are too difficult for one person to carry” (Scott McKnight, *NIV Application Bible Commentary on Galatians, Zondervan, 1995,* p. 285).

This call to care for and help carry the burdens of others certainly has a tiring aspect to it. Paul recognizes this and so admonishes the Christians “not to become weary in well doing for at the proper time we will read a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal.6:9). The answer lies in the Spirit. God has given us the Spirit to empower us to fulfill this law of love. As the Spirit pours Gods love into our hearts (Rom.5:5), out of that infilling comes the ability to pour that love out for others. This kind of caring is divinely inspired and enabled.

But, is this command for Christians another legalistic approach to life, as the law of Moses was? No, the law of Christ is His law of love: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn.13:14-15). Peter adds, “Above all, love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins.” (I Pet.4:8). God’s love in and through Christians can transform them so that they see each other’s needs and burdens from God’s perspective. Through the power of the Spirit in them, they can then help shoulder other’s burdens rather than judge them for having such burdens. Samuel Ngewa says, in the *African Bible Commentary*, “a burden is any hardship, whether physical, emotional, mental, moral or spiritual” (p. 1424). We can help each other shoulder our burdens in humility because we know how Christ has shouldered our burdens and brought us through crisis after crisis. The Passion translates Gal. 6:2 as “Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other’s troubles.” For me, this admonition to bear one another’s burdens is one of the blessed marks of Christian community, and part of the privilege of belonging to the Body of Christ. Our walk with God is both relational with the Lord Himself and communal in our relationships with each other. Vertical and Horizontal.

**How We Bear One Another’s Burdens**

So how do we do it, practically? Let me suggest three simple steps.

First, God’s burden-bearing starts with Christians coming to Christ at his invitation: “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). When we understand how to lay all our burdens on Christ, we are in better condition to help others do the same.

Second, God promises to give believers specific words to help the weary when we seek them from Him. Isa. 50:4 says:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed”. NIV

The Message translates this verse as:

“The Master, God, has given me a well-taught tongue, so I know how to encourage tired people. He wakes me up in the morning, Wakes me up, opens my ears to listen as one ready to take orders. The Master, God, opened my ears, and I didn’t go back to sleep,”

A very practical wording, indeed! A healing burden-bearer receives appropriate words and actions directly from the Lord. That ensures that the burden-bearing is supportive, compassionate and divinely blessed. Sometimes burden-bearing has traces of pride on the part of the restorer or judgment of the one struggling, or even abuse when it is done in a controlling manner that subjugates the struggler to the direction, criticism and control of the other. Burden-bearing God’s way lifts up rather than oppresses.

And third, we can look to the Spirit to know each day whom the Spirit is leading us to support. Some relationships and situations require a long term commitment to carry each other’s burdens, but others are more short term or even involve a spontaneous interaction in a public place where the appropriate word or prayer is God’s leading at that moment.

A friend of mine has a passion for evangelism. When she was staying at a hotel recently, the Lord drew her attention to a desk clerk in the hotel lobby. Despite my friend’s own busy agenda and pressing issues in her visit, she followed the Spirit’s prompting and engaged the hotel clerk in a spiritual conversation that revealed the woman’s soul needs. After empathetic conversation, my friend asked if she could bring those needs to God together in prayer. The woman gratefully agreed. In that encounter she was able to temporarily carry that person’s burden together into God’ presence through prayer and lay it at God’s feet.

These kinds of brief encounters can include words of encouragement or hope God prompts us to share with another by messaging, texts, email, phone calls or person to person visits. They fulfill God’s desire that we comfort one another, exhort one another, pray for one another, serve one another – all as practical outworkings of the supreme command to love one another. Considering our very weary and suffering world today, this gift of burden-bearing is more needed than ever. God will lead us step by step so we know who to come alongside, for how long, in what practical ways, and with what words or actions or simply our presence that will communicate God’s love to him or her.

Beloved, having been on the receiving end, as well as the giving end of this kind of ministry, I can attest to the evidence of how others’ burden-bearing for me has released God’s sustaining presence, deliverance and support in times of acute and chronic need. Thanks be to God!

May we each be sensitive to this prompting of the Spirit: G**al.6:2: *Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.***

For Jesus Sake. Amen.

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