

Bear One Another's Burdens

Reading: Eccl 4:8-12; Galatians 6:1-5

A couple of weeks ago, we purchased a new washer and dryer. In that process, we got rid of our old washer and dryer. Dryers are fairly light; one person can move a dryer around fairly easily. But washers are rather heavy. To move our washer around required some help.

We gave our old washer to someone, and he arrived with two guys to help him move the washer out of our house and on to a trailer. And when he got home, he needed help moving it into his basement.

In some areas of life, we need help moving heavy objects. We need help lifting and carrying things.

That is true in a physical sense, and it's also true in other senses. Sometimes life gives us problems—heavy burdens to bear—that we need help to carry. Any number of problems may arise that we cannot handle by ourselves—financial issues, family problems, health issues, job uncertainties, etc. These are the burdens of life.

The Bible tells us to “cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee” (Ps 55:22).

It also tells us, ...

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

As we continue with our Summer Sermon Series today, we're looking at this command, “Bear ye one another's burdens.”

Let's consider what this text is telling us.

I. Meaning of the word “bear” (βαστάζω)

- A. The word simply means “to lift up, to raise.” It could be translated as “carry, uphold, or support.” It's a common NT word.
- B. And we should note that this is a command—an imperative. We are obligated to bear one another's burdens. This is not optional; it's a biblical expectation; it's a Christian responsibility; it's a normal part of the Christian life.

And the tense of the verb (pres act impv) suggests *continuing action*.

We regularly help bear the burdens of fellow believers.

If someone needs help, we *continue to help* him. It may be an ongoing project with those we are helping.

II. The meaning of “burdens”

A. The word (βάρος) literally means “weight.” Normally, this pertains to a heavy weight that one would need help carrying.

1. Remember the context here: cf. 6:1. The particular burden bearing in view is helping sustain others as they try to overcome their sins. We lift up the fallen brother and continue to support him with counsel and encouragement after he is restored.

When members of the church experience particular temptations and struggle with the flesh, the entire church body must respond by supporting or helping the struggling member. We help the fallen member and then hold him up when he’s back on his feet.

Rom 15:1 *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak,*

And so fellow Christians must help a stumbling believer to repent of his sin and restore his relationship to God. We bear the burdens of those who are trying to overcome sinful temptations.

Unfortunately, the tendency among believer is often to “shoot the wounded” instead of helping them overcome their sins. We cannot tolerate flagrant sin within the church, but at the same time we must work with people who are struggling to overcome sinful patterns of life.

Maybe people are having a hard time overcoming their sin because no one is helping them. They need someone to come along side of them and help them deal with these issues. We ought to do everything we can to help someone overcome his sin.

2. But the application here is broader than that. The command refers to a wide variety of burdens, troubles, difficulties, and problems. E.g., financial disaster, sickness, relationship problems, persecution, pain, loss, etc. – virtually any kind of struggle people experience. When we see someone laboring under a heavy load, we step in to lighten the load by sharing the burden.

Believers must help one another shoulder the load of life’s troubles, whatever they may be. We should rally around those who suffer and help them bear their heavy burdens.

B. Who is responsible to bear these burdens?

1. The word “one another” (Ἀλλήλων) actually comes first in this sentence. Paul seems to be emphasizing the one another aspect here.
2. Note the plural in the command: “bear **ye** one another’s burdens.” This is addressed to the entire church.
 - a) In some cases, we deal with the burden *confidentially/privately*. When dealing with issues of sin, one person may confront an erring brother about a problem without involving others (Mt 18:15).
 - b) In some cases, just a *small group* of people might know about a problem and help bear it.

In some cases of spiritual restoration, “ye which are spiritual” must take action to help a brother overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1).
 - c) Sometimes the *whole church* can help people bear their burdens. The entire church cooperates and gets involved. E.g., we often provide funds for those in need.

We are commanded to help one another when we face trials and tribulations. The people of the church rally around and support one another through their problems. Sharing one another’s burdens is one of the most profound and significant things we can do as Christians.

Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, ...*

Philippians 2:4 *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Christian life is community life. We are supposed to care for one another, share our burdens, and lift up the fallen. We don’t live in isolation; we live in loving, caring community of faith. We are concerned about the burdens of others—who is sick? Who is having financial problems? Who is lonely? Who has fallen into sin and needs to be confronted and restored? We care about such things.

When people share their needs with us, we need to be sensitive to their struggles. That means getting our eyes off ourselves and noticing what others are going through.

C. How do we bear one another's burdens?

1. Friendship/fellowship/partnership

As an aside: One of the most important partnerships in life is marriage. For those who are contemplating marriage, make sure that you find someone who can help you bear the burdens of life.

2. Prayer – knowing that others are praying for you is a great comfort and a relief of burdens. Even if you can do nothing else to help, you can always pray.

3. Advice/counsel/admonition – sometimes we just need some advice or instruction or rebuke.

4. Biblical teaching – we can help people by telling them what the Bible says about various things.

5. Physical or financial help – help the person move his washing machine. Give the person some money.

6. Referrals or networking to find other avenues of help – help the person connect with others who can help.

Trans: There are many ways we can help others bear their burdens.

III. Barriers to effective burden-bearing

A. Lack of communication: those struggling with burdens might be reluctant to share their struggles with others—to unburden yourself to someone.

Tell someone in the church about the problems you are going through. Don't expect people to read your mind or sense the difficulty you are experiencing. You can't blame others for not responding if you keep your burden to yourself.

Some people think it's somehow better to suffer in silence as if everything were just fine. Some people are very secretive about their struggles; they don't want others to find out. But there is no shame in enlisting the help of others when you are struggling with a heavy burden. That's what you are supposed to do.

How can the church help someone bear a burden if he refuses to share it with others? If you have a problem, tell others so they can help you bear up under the burden.

You may be aware that there is a real problem these days with loneliness and isolation. People today seem to be more and more isolated from the community. It's easy to isolate ourselves and not share our burdens with others. It's easy to focus only on our own interests. But that is not what a community does.

We need to *bear and share* our burdens. We are obligated to do so; this is a command—"Share your burdens with others; let them help you bear up under your heavy load."

Another barrier to effective burden bearing is...

- B. Lack of interest/concern: we all get caught up in our own worlds, and we often focus on our own set of problems. When under the pressure of our own burdens, it's hard to sympathize with others who have different problems.

But as Christians, we are morally obligated to care about and help people with their burdens. Even when we are shouldering our own burdens, we can still help others. In fact, sometimes it helps us to help others.

- C. Lack of biblical commitment: failure to help others in their time of need is simple disobedience to clear biblical commands. When people are burdened, fellow believers must respond; it is our biblical responsibility. We must not neglect others who are struggling under a heavy burden.

IV. Bearing one another's burdens fulfills the "law of Christ."

- A. Note the connection here: Bear one another's burdens *and so* (καὶ οὕτως – in this way) fulfill the law of Christ. We obey Christ by bearing one another's burdens.
- B. What is the "law of Christ"?
 - 1. This is the one and only time in the Bible that we find the phrase "the law of Christ."
 - 2. Broadly speaking, the "law of Christ" encompasses the teaching of Jesus and the apostles (cf. Acts 1:1–2). The law of Christ is the NT.

3. The particular law in view is probably one that Jesus repeated frequently: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

Galatians 5:14 *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

James 2:8 ... *fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,*

4. Bearing burdens “fulfills” (ἀναπληρώσατε) the law of Christ. We demonstrate love for neighbors by helping to bear their burdens.

App: How are you doing in fulfilling the law of Christ? Are you involved in helping those who are struggling to bear their burdens? You should be; this ought to be normal.

And, if you have a burden, you should share it with others so they can help you bear up under it. We want to help one another.

Bearing one another’s burdens can be messy business. It means that I have to get involved in the lives of others. It may cost me something. It will probably be inconvenient. Yet this is how we demonstrate the love of Christ and fulfill the law of Christ.

- C. As the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, our neighbors are those in need. We show our love for Christ and for one another by bearing one another’s burdens.
- D. And when we receive help, we ought to show our gratitude. We ought to appreciate the fact that someone helped us shoulder a heavy load.

One more thing before finishing up: We should note that vs. 5 says that “every man shall bear his own burden.”

Is he contradicting himself? No. This is actually a different word for “burden.” It may not be evident in English, but in the original language, Paul uses two different words here.

- A. The word for burden in vs. 2 (βάρος) suggests a heavy load that you need help lifting. E.g., a washing machine. People need help with these heavy burdens of life.

B. The word in vs. 5 (φορτίον) speaks of a burden/load that it is appropriate for one person to bear by himself, such as a worker's knapsack or tool bag. This is the same word Jesus used when he said "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt 11:30).

C. Paul is pointing out two different senses/ideas.

1. Vs. 2 shows us that some burdens we *share* with others. When our personal burdens become too much for us to bear, then we need to share them. We need help carrying the heavy burdens of life, and we should be willing to help those under such burdens.
2. Vs. 5 shows us that some burdens we *bear* alone; i.e., we have to take responsibility for ourselves. We have to take care of our own personal issues.
3. The danger here is that some people refuse to take responsibility for themselves. The natural human tendency is to shift the burden to others. Even minor, light burdens that one should bear himself, some people will ask others to bear for them.

People ought to be able to carry the normal, standard burdens of life that everyone has to carry. We all have the normal burdens of life, and we should not try to shift those responsibilities to others unnecessarily.

But some people, perhaps out of sheer laziness, will ask others to do for them what they ought to do for themselves. And if you are willing to do that for others, they are perfectly happy to let you bear their burdens. They will exploit your generosity. If you are willing to carry their light load, they are happy to have you do it.

When you carry a burden that the other person should be carrying for himself, you are simply enabling him to neglect his own responsibilities. Carrying a burden that someone should be able to carry for himself is not a good idea.

4. Obviously, we have to seek a balance in our lives. Some burdens we *share* with others; some burdens we *bear* ourselves. We have to be responsible in both cases.

One of the great blessings of being a Christian and being part of a local church is that others help bear your heavy burdens. Life is full of major challenges and disasters, and we need fellow believers to help us bear the burdens of life. We should not hesitate to ask for help when we need it.

Each of us has our own set of burdens, but we still ought to be looking for ways to help others with their burdens. At times, the entire church must come together to bear the burdens of a fellow member of the church.

If you have a heavy burden that you are stumbling under, let others help. The church has numbers of resources available to help you bear up under your burden. E.g., the deacons' fund

Let's try to be sensitive to the needs of others. Try to be aware of what others are going through. Ask people how they are doing; ask if you can do anything for them. Or just show up and help. Get involved; do something to aid the person who is struggling.

Fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens.