**Bear one another’s burdens**

Text: Galatians 6:1-5

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**Scriptures:** Galatians 5:16-26; Numbers 11:1-17; Galatians 6:1-5

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 66, 32, 419, ‘The Power of the Cross’, 365

**Series:** The ‘one anothers’ of Scripture (#2)

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul calls all the Spirit-filled Galatians to bear one another’s burdens as one way of loving others rather than judging others (instead of examining themselves).

**Proposition:** Spirit filled disciples of Christ – bear one another’s burdens because Christ has borne yours for you.

**Introduction**

Most people are weightlifters. Would you agree? The quantity of weight varies between different individuals. When we are unwell, aging, or suffer the consequences of a physical disability we may not even be able to lift up our hands or our head, but for most of us most of the time we can. In addition, many of us can lift and carry a shopping bag, some a heavier object like a large sack of potatoes, and a few a heavily loaded weight bar in a gym.

However, for everyone, there is a quantity of weight which is just too much to bear. For New Zealand Olympic athlete David Liti, he was able to lift 178kg in Tokyo, but no more. We could say that any more weight for him was ‘unbearable’. That is a word we use in the English language to describe something which is too painful or unpleasant for a person to continue to experience.

Suffering and pain can be unbearable. They weigh heavily on the human soul and at times on the body. David described the unbearable load of unconfessed sin in this way: “*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*” (Psalm 32:3-4).

It is impossible to live in this world, in which we all experience gravity, without carrying some physical load (even if that is only the weight of our own body in part or in whole). Likewise, it is impossible to live in this fallen world in which we all experience the effects of sin, without ‘carrying’ some suffering and pain. We are all weight lifters. We all carry loads of one kind or another. These loads may be physical, spiritual, emotional, or relational.

We are all carrying loads today. Our text from Galatians 6:1-5 is about bearing one another’s burdens and bearing our own loads. This sermon is the second in a series through the “one anothers” of Scripture. Last week we considered Christ’s command to ‘*love one another, just as I have loved you*’ (John 13:34). This morning we’ll see how the command to ‘*bear one another’s burdens*’ (Gal 6:2) is an outworking of loving one another. We’ll look at our text under three headings:

1. The burdened believer
2. The spiritual bearer
3. The supporting love of Christ
4. **The burdened believer**

The English word ‘caught’ in the first verse of our text conveys the idea of being taken by surprise, being caught in, discovered in, or overcome by.

Our text is part of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the ‘*churches of Galatia*’ (1:2). The context is an unexpected entanglement in sin. Paul is describing a situation in which a brother or sister in Christ has been ‘*caught in any transgression*’ (v1). This describes a fellow believer who has unexpectedly become entangled in sin that has come upon them suddenly. This is not the situation of someone who has knowingly and persistently been in a pattern of wrongdoing, but rather a person who has stumbled into sin without consciously intending to do so. This is someone who has been overcome by temptation ‘in the spur of the moment’.

Is this not an ever-present danger for us all in this life? Remember what God said to Cain: “*Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it*." (Gen 4:7b). There is a great burden when sin comes upon a child of God. It is like carrying around the dead weight of a corpse. As Paul himself struggled with the weight of sin he cried out “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Rom 7:24).

The Greek word translated ‘burdens’ means something which presses down on a person physically, emotionally or spiritually. Jesus used this word when He said of the Pharisees “*they tie up* ***heavy burdens****, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger*” (Matt 23:4). In contrast John uses the same word when writes in his first letter “*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are* ***not burdensome***” (1 John 5:3).

The burdens which we are called to bear for others are first and foremost the heavy load of suddenly being caught in sin - as is clear from the verse 1: ‘*caught in any transgression*’. They also likely include, more generally, all kinds of weakness (Rom 15:1), temptations, sufferings, and pain; that is - anything in this life which is hard to bear alone.

Imagine that you see a ‘little old lady’ struggling to cross the street as she carries in each hand a full bag of shopping. Her need is obvious and so is the way in which you can help her! If you are able, offer to carry her shopping and accompany her across the road. You could also consider guiding her all the way to her home (it’s unlikely to be too far away!).

The burden of sin is generally more difficult to see in the life of a fellow brother or sister in Christ than physical burdens that we carry. Why is that? Our natural pattern with our sin is to conceal it from others. If it is sin that you have unexpectedly become caught in, you are likely embarrassed about what has happened and concerned about what other people would think about you if they knew. Perhaps this sin is sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, envy, or drunkenness (to quote from part of the list in Galatians 5:19-20. Perhaps you’ve shared personal weaknesses and sins with other people in the past only to find your trust betrayed when your very intimate information is spread to others in the church through careless gossip. ’Once bitten – twice shy’.

If you and I are going to be aware of the burden of sin in the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters it is necessary for us to have a close, trusting, open relationship with them. Such a relationship enables a bond of confidential mutual accountability where we can speak openly about our failures and weaknesses revealing the burden that these are for us. This is also true for the burdens of physical, emotional, and relational suffering and pain which we all bear at different times in our lives. Before we can bear the burdens of others, we need to understand the nature of those burdens. That understanding is gained through a close, trusting relationship with our overburdened brother or sister. This includes being willing to be vulnerable with one another. Without this, when we ask a question like ‘how are you doing?’ we are likely to get the answer “I’m fine” when you can see from their body language that they are certainly not!

Most of all the burdened believer needs Christ, but secondly and also importantly they need other spiritual burden bearers. This brings us to our second point:

1. **The spiritual bearer**

When we last moved house, we were greatly assisted by some young men with plenty of muscle power for lifting and carrying heavy objects like couches, tables and bookcases. If you want someone to help you carry a heavy physical load it is wise to look for a person with sufficient bodily strength for the task. We are going to see from our text that the same principle applies in the spiritual realm.

You might think that the task of helping the burdened believer with his or her heavy load belongs **only** to the Minister, the Elders, and the Deacons. The Scriptures reveal otherwise. It is the ‘spiritual’ person who is to restore the brother or sister who has been suddenly overtaken by sin and who is to bear their burden. This restoration is to be done gently and may involve speaking in love to the person about their sin (Matt 18:15-17) or quietening their conscience if they are overly sensitive in situations where they have not actually sinned.

Who then is a ‘spiritual person’? They are identified by their fruit, as Paul has explained in the previous chapter: “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). The spiritual person is someone who has been born again (John 3:3). This spiritual disciple was once dead in their trespasses and sins, but now they are alive together in Christ (Eph 2:5). The spiritual believer understands that this life is a battle against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers - the spiritual forces of evil (Eph 6:12). The spiritual brother or sister in Christ knows that they need to be constantly watchful because their adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8). So, Paul exhorts the spiritual believers in the churches of Galatia to ‘*keep watch on yourselves, lest you too be tempted*’ (v1).

It is those who walk by the spirit (Gal 5:16) who are to be the spiritual bearers of the heavy loads which others struggle with as burdened believers. Brothers and sisters in Christ – we are all called to be spiritual bearers of the heavy burdens of fellow disciples.

By way of contrast, how might we describe the response of an unspiritual person to others who carry heavy loads of temptation and sin that have come upon them suddenly? Judgmental, condemning, unkind, unhelpful, and lacking in compassion, understanding and grace.

The Pharisees in Jesus’s day were like this. They were the legalistic ‘separated ones’ who looked down on the ‘sinners’. They showed no willingness to help those who struggled with the heavy burdens of sin, affliction, distress, isolation, vulnerability, and pain. Instead, they looked down on sinners, lepers, and tax-collectors amongst others. They were cold, unfeeling but oh so very religious. However, even though they were leaders in Judaism, the scribes and Pharisees were not ‘spiritual’. They were ‘clean on the outside’ but inside ‘full of greed and self-indulgence’ (Matt 23:25). The scribes and Pharisees, in the words of Gal 6:3 thought that they were something, when they were ‘nothing’ and they deceived themselves.

In contrast to the ‘unspiritual’, those who are spiritual constantly review their own lives so that they will not fool themselves. Look at verse 4: “*But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour*”. The word ‘test’ in verse 4 was used in the Greek world to describe the process of testing metals to determine if they were pure. Brothers and sisters: each one of us should concentrate on our own conduct, not that of others. The call here is to engage in self-assessment, not in critical evaluation of others. Our natural tendency is the other way round – to focus on the ‘speck’ in someone else’s eye, rather than the ‘log’ in our own (Matt 7:3-5).

When you have truly tested yourself to see if you are pure – do you know what you will find? No reason to boast. No complete purity. No security in yourself. Paul warns the Corinthians “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor 10:12).

The disciple of Christ who is spiritual knows that God alone is the ultimate judge, and a day is coming when each person will stand alone before Him. Paul explains this to the Corinthians this way (2 Cor 5:10) “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil*” (also Romans 14:12). He puts it in these words to the Galatians (6:5) “*For each will have to bear his own load*”. The Greek word translated ‘load’ here is **not** the same one as ‘burdens’ in verse 2. We are to bear one another’s burdens in this life, but on the Day of Judgement, we will each be entirely responsible for our own load.

Brothers and sisters, the reality is that we are **all** burdened believers to some degree. We all need each other to help us bear our burdens. However, to accept such assistance requires personal honesty, humility, and vulnerability. Are you willing both to accept help to bear your own burdens and also to carry those that weigh others down? Doing this fulfils the ‘*law of Christ*’ (v2) which brings us to our last point:

1. **The supporting love of Christ**

Think about this statement “Christ is the greatest weight-bearer of all time’. When I say this, perhaps you think of Jesus carrying the horizontal crossbeam to Calvary (John 19:17) before Simon of Cyrene was seized and forced to bear this heavy weight (Luke 23:26). Jesus was greatly weakened physically from the heavy scourging that he had already endured (Mark 15:15). The Almighty Son of God, in his suffering humanity could not carry the wooden beam upon which he would be brutally hung until he died. Yet it was there on that cross that Jesus carried the full weight of all the sins of all God’s people. A load which would be utterly unbearable for any mere human being. I therefore put it to you that Jesus is the greatest weight-bearer of all time.

Isaiah prophesied about His burden-bearing this way: “*He bore the sin of many*” (Isaiah 53:12). The Apostle Peter reveals: “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed*” (1 Peter 2:24). We heard the words of Christ last week when we started this series through the “one-anothers” of Scripture: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*." (John 13:34-35). The greatest burden-bearing of Christ was on the cross where He bore the righteous anger of God the Father on behalf of all those who are ‘spiritual’ - that is those who have been, or are yet to be, born-again by the Spirit.

It was at the cross that the power and extent of the great love of God is most clearly seen. Remember that Jesus said, “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). Jesus calls us, brothers and sisters, to love one another as He has loved us. As we saw last week this means:

1. Committing yourself to love others by denying yourself.
2. Committing yourself to love all kinds of people.
3. Committing yourself to love for Christ’s sake.

In our text today the call is to: “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2). Here the ‘law of Christ’ most likely refers to the ‘new commandment’ to love one another just as Jesus has loved you. Putting all this together we could say “Bear one another’s burdens because Christ has borne yours for you”. This reveals the right motivation to bear one another’s burdens: Christ Himself and your thankful love for Him.

In fact, the invitation which the Saviour of the world extends to everyone who will listen is all about burden bearing. Jesus says: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus offers to carry the burden of sin for all who will come to him so that they can have rest.

Have you yet come to Christ - or are you still labouring under a great weight of sin, guilt and shame? {pause} In Christ, that unbearable weight of sin is replaced with a very manageable ‘load’ which Jesus describes as being ‘light’. Why is the ‘load’ of responsibility which is part of being alive together with Christ so light? Because, like a strong ox shouldering most of the weight with a yoke which is connected to a much weaker ox, so likewise Christ does all the ‘heavy lifting’ for us.

As we’ve been reminded, He has already borne the enormous weight of our sin – which killed Him. He also gives us strength for our lives now through the Holy Spirit. ‘Walking in the Spirit’ (Gal 5:16) is living this life in the strength of Christ, not in trying to bear all our own load. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote: “*For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor 12:10). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, some of the last words which Moses said to the Israelites on the verge of the Promised Land speak of the supporting love of the Lord. “*The eternal God is your dwelling place, and* ***underneath are the everlasting arms****. And he thrust out the enemy before you and said, Destroy*” (Deut 33:27).

Fellow believer, underneath you are the everlasting arms of the Lord who supports you. In Christ, your enemies; sin, death and Satan have been thrust out before you. You are supported by the everlasting love of the Lord. So, even though you are living this life in a fallen world as a burdened believer, you can be strong in Him.

Brothers and sisters, these words of Psalm 27:13-14 apply to us! “*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*”. You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. You are ‘spiritual’. You and I, all of us who are in Christ, are each called to “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2). This is part of loving one another as Christ has loved us. James wisely writes “*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Jam 1:22).

So, the question is having heard this, will you do it? Will you pursue close, trusting, vulnerable relationships with one another? Will you be very careful to maintain confidentially and not to gossip? Will you ‘*keep watch on yourselves, lest you too be tempted*’ (v1). Will you engage in self-assessment, not in critical evaluation of others? Will you accept help from others by being honest, humble, and vulnerable with them? Are you willing to bear some of the burdens which weigh others down?

When we bear one another’s burdens we fulfil the law of Christ. He is honoured and glorified in this, and we are all helped to continue our life’s journey towards our final destination – the paradise of the New Earth. Until that day, continue to rely on the supporting love of Christ – the greatest burden bearer who says, “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”.*

AMEN.