

Galatians: Free in Christ

Bear One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:1-5

The fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh show up in the church community. Paul wants the Galatians and all Christian to abound in love and to know how to help the struggling and those overtaken in sin. This passage is full of horse sense for living together.

Spiritual Correction

The church is messy which means we need to be ready to help clean up. Love covers a multitude of sins, but when love sees someone overtaken in a trespass, it intervenes. As a spiritual person—walking in the Spirit—you can't ignore or play down a gripping sin, but neither can you jump all over it. Paul says to consider yourself, first whether you are spiritual, and second to be sure you are being gentle and guarded against temptation (v1). This contrasts with the conceited person who looks down on some people and competes, and up to some people and envies (5:26). The spiritual person looks level at a brother or sister and asks, "Can I help this person given my situation and temptations?" The temptations to consider include both my skill and ability to help. If I'm overtaken in sin or ill equipped about what needs addressing, I'm not the right guy. I also need to be gentle and ready for the response. The word *restore* can mean to mend or put back into place and is used medically about a dislocated joint or broken bone (cf. Mk. 1:19). We are mindful of our own frailty and sinfulness as we approach others, so we "run unto him, and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms", says Luther. Apart from God's grace, we would be prone to the same sins if not worse.

Odious Comparisons

False teachers assigned all sorts of religious burdens on the Galatians. The law of Christ is love, and it removes burdens from people (v3). This imitates God and lifts up our brothers and sisters (Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7; 2 Cor. 7:5-6). It's easy for us to take no interest in the lives of others, and not to seek the input of others into our lives. Self-sufficiency is a deadly assumption. To be impressed with yourself because without objective perspective is to be self-deceived (v4; 2 Cor. 10:12). The solution is to examine ourselves by God's standard, rejoice, and then boast in Christ (5:22-23, v4, 6:14). Restoring a brother, lightening another's load, and doing a job well is wonderfully satisfying.

Bear Your Own Load

The blessing of doing your job is not to be underestimated. Our calling begins with accomplishing what God has given us to do, and this means saying no to what He hasn't. We should put the right things on our plate and finish them.

NOTES:

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This seems to be in tension with what Paul just said in verse two (“Bear one another’s burdens”), but it dovetails perfectly. The word for “burden” in verse two indicates a heavy and unmanageable one, like cargo on a freighter. The “load” of verse five is one person’s pack or share. When something heavy falls on our brother, we want to be there to help, but this requires preparation. When we carry our own load well, not over-packing with extraneous things, the extra margin that allows us to help our neighbor. Obviously our ability and capacity change in different seasons of life, but the goal remains the same: to love God with everything, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.