

## **BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS FOR GOD'S SAKE**

**Today's Text: Gal. 6: 1-10**

### **Extracts:**

**Brethren, if a 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. *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ....Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith [Gal. 6: 1-2, 7-10]***

*Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities (1859) is a historical novel that has sold over 200 million copies and ranks among the most famous works in the history of literary fiction.<sup>1</sup> It is set in time before and during the French Revolution of 1789. During that era in French history, the poor peasants were looked down upon by the aristocracy. In one story, a noble man, Marquis St. Evrémonte, drove his carriage fast through the crowded streets of Paris, knocked down and killed the son of a peasant called Gaspard. As people wailed over the dead child, the noble man simply peered through the drawn curtains of his carriage as if to see if the wheels had been stained by the blood of the dead child. He threw a coin at the grieving Gaspard and sped off. That night, Marquis was murdered. Not long after, the peasants stormed the Bastille, the maximum security prison, set the inmates free and ignited the now famous French Revolution.*

*All it required of the noble man was to show some care and concern for the bereaved family. In his own thinking, throwing money at them was a form of caring but it was not appropriate. We may find ourselves in a similar situation. Many of us do not care about other people, claiming that it is not their responsibility. Some of us do care but it is more for public relations. A few do genuinely care and do share other people's burdens. But, no matter what we do, each person shall reap what s(he) sows. That is Paul's message to believers in the church in Galatia as well as for us modern believers. Do you bear one another's burdens for God's sake? Do you know that doing so can be for your own good? Those questions and more are what we shall attempt to answer in this week's study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: "A Tale of Two Cities," From Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Tale\\_of\\_Two\\_Cities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Tale_of_Two_Cities) and "A Tale of Two Cities: Charles Dickens," <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/twocities/summary.html>

## 1. Background: You are either a burden or a burden bearer!

*The Parable of the Prodigal Son [Lk 15: 11-32]* is well known to most of us. A rich man had two sons. One day, the younger one asked his father to give him his share of his estate. In other words, he was asking his father to execute his will even before his death. We know that a will is not valid until the testator is dead [Heb. 9: 16-17]. Nevertheless, his father heeded his request, gave him his share of his estate, and the young man disappeared to a foreign land where he wasted his wealth on prodigal living. Broke and broken, he returned home to ask for his father's forgiveness and reinstatement. His father did so, quite happily, but not his elder brother.

He was angry that his father had organised a feast for his wayward brother whereas he who had been ever so faithful had not even been given a young goat with which to entertain his friends. His younger brother had become a burden but why should he, the good one, bear the burden? His father could not afford that posture. He told his angry son, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found" [Lk 15: 31-32]. From the perspective of this week's study, we can conclude that *the younger son reaped where he had not sown while the older son was tired of doing good; but their father bore both sons' burdens-waywardness and selfishness. God expects us to be like that father.*

How often have you found yourselves these days wondering whether it was not better to be an island to yourself? *You have tried to be kind to others and you have been repaid with ingratitude. You have tried to guide people out of sin or error and they have rebuked you for playing judge over them. But deep down within you, you cannot afford to give up on them. What if the affected people were your own family or members of the congregation that you were pastoring? Could you afford to give up on them? Could you afford to keep yourself away but offend God?*

Paul comes to our rescue as we wrestle with such issues. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of his letter to the Galatian church, Paul draws our attention to the following matters on *bearing and sharing one another's burdens for God's sake:*

- a) *Of course, each person's burden is his/her responsibility*

Paul writes, "Each one shall bear his own load" [Gal. 6: 5]. In other words, each person's burden is primarily his or her responsibility because, as the word of God says, the soul that sins shall die [Ezek. 18: 4]. *The person that has head ache is the one who should take analgesics!* Therefore, there is no room for blame shifting.

Take the example of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even though Satan was behind their fall, their attempt to shift the blame to others was not acceptable to God. Adam blamed his wife, saying to God, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” Eve said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” But God punished both of them all the same and not Satan alone [**Gen. 3: 11-19**]. On the other hand, the prodigal son accepted responsibility for his own predicament and decided to return home to ask for his father’s forgiveness [**Lk 15: 17-19**].

Therefore, no matter how others, such as parents, spouses, teachers and pastors, may care about you and your present situation, it is still your primary responsibility to get out of it. ***You may not be able to help yourself but you can at least show gratitude for others’ concern. So, gratitude, appreciation and a willingness to receive help and change are marks of accepting responsibility for your burdens.***

b) *Nevertheless, no one can stand on his/her own*

Paul writes, “For, if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” [**Gal. 6: 3-4**]. In other words, no one can stand on his/her own without help from others. Nobody is an island to himself/herself. You may be rich in silver and gold but very poor in peace of mind. For example, Naaman, commander of the army of Syria, “was a great and honourable man [and] also a mighty man of valour, but a leper.” It took help from his wife’s Jewish maid to find a cure from God through the prophet Elisha [**2 Kgs 5: 1-15**].

So, we cannot afford to ignore other people’s burdens because we ourselves could be smiling (outwardly) but suffering (inside) too!

c) *That is why we all need help*

So, we all need help, and Paul puts it this way [**Gal. 6: 1-2**]:

*Brethren, if a 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. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

Yes, we all need help but such help must be given in a spirit of gentleness. That is, it must be clear that you want to help or to correct but not to judge. You are doing it for Christ and so, you must follow His law, which is to ***do unto others as you would have them do unto you*** [**Matt. 7: 12**].

d) *You reap what you sow*

By their fruits, we shall know them [**Matt. 7: 16**]. Paul writes, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” [**Gal. 6: 7-8**].

***Your motives and methods are equally as important as the desired outcomes for the people whose burdens you are helping to relieve.*** For example, before His ascension, Jesus asked Peter thrice if he loved Him—as if to match the number of times he had denied the Lord during His trial. He then commissioned Peter to feed His lamb and His sheep [**Jn 21: 15-17**]. Earlier, soon after His resurrection, an angel that spoke to Mary Magdalene and her companions said, “But go, tell His disciples- *and Peter*-that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” [**Mk 16: 1-7**]. Peter was one of the disciples but he was named to assure him he was still one of the Lord’s disciples. Jesus sowed genuine love and reconciliation in Peter’s restoration and he became a major pillar of the early church after the Lord’s ascension to heaven [**Acts Chaps 1 & 2**]. Indeed, people reap what they have sown. Unless we do it subject to the law of Christ, it is a futile effort.

e) *But don’t be tired of doing good*

Some of us may be discouraged because of other people’s ingratitude or on account of our unholy motives. However, Paul has encouraged us by saying, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all” [**Gal. 6: 9-10**].

In an increasingly wicked world, people repay evil for good. People are ungrateful. People have an entitlement mentality- you are doing for them what you are required to do and what they are entitled to. Therefore, gratitude or appreciation is out of the question! Even during the Lord’s time on earth, He healed ten lepers but only one, the foreigner among them, came back to thank Him [**Lk 17:11-18**]. Nevertheless, whatever pity you have on the poor is a lending to the Lord and He will repay you [**Prov. 19:17**]. The poor is that person who may have a sin burden or a material lack or need spiritual guidance, and that is every one of us! Therefore, you cannot afford to grow tired of doing good.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that ***all of us are burdens to as well as burden-bearers for others. It becomes a problem when we only want to receive without giving back in accordance with the law of Christ.*** How can such a problem be avoided or prevented?

## 2. Lessons for the modern believer

An important lesson for the modern believer is that ***there is a right way and a wrong way to be a burden-bearer if we want to do it according to the law of Christ***. Here are a few guidelines to assist us to do it the right way:

### a) *Use empathy not sympathy*

Sometimes, we claim that our kind gesture was not appreciated by others. Rather than being an act of ingratitude, it may be more of an inappropriate response from us to others' predicament. In most cases, we tend to view issues from our perspective. That is called sympathy. A more appropriate response should be based on ***empathy, which is looking at the matter from the other party's perspective***. If you want to win, use empathy, not sympathy.

Jesus Himself gave us the best demonstration of empathy when He came to the grave of Lazarus. He knew that He was going to raise Lazarus back to life. But when He came to the grave site, everybody was weeping. We are told, "Therefore, when Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping," Jesus Himself also wept. Then onlookers said, "See how much He loved him!" [**Jn 11: 33-36**]. You can then imagine their joy when Lazarus was raised to life. Indeed, Jesus mourned with those who mourned and rejoiced with those who rejoiced and so demonstrated for us the desirable true godly conduct in similar circumstances [**Rom. 12: 15**].

### b) *Enable not cripple*

In helping to lift other people's burdens, we must be careful not to cripple them in the process. Rather, ***our aim should be to enable them to avoid such pitfalls in the future***. According to an African proverb, you should first drive away the hawk before blaming the hen for straying. Most times, we tend to throw away the baby with the bathwater. We blame or judge rather than correct. In the end, those that we are trying to help reject our help or relapse into a deeper mess.

Our Lord has again given us the right model. In His encounter with the woman caught in adultery, she faced the danger of instant death by stoning (under the Law of Moses) and the weightier matter of adultery in the sight of God. After He had rescued her from the crowd, Jesus turned to her and said, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She replied that there was no one. Then He replied her, "***Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more***" [**Jn 8: 1-11**]. She got a new leash of life in a different and redeeming direction! She was enabled, not crippled.

c) *Don't expect man's reward but God's*

We may be tempted to expect our good deeds to be reciprocated or immediately appreciated but that may not be God's plan to reward us. For example, Esther's husband, King Ahasuerus, did not even know that it was Esther's uncle, Mordecai that had saved his life when some of his servants conspired to kill him. The report was made in the book of the chronicles that the king did not read at the time [**Esth. 2: 21-23**]. However, several years later, when Haman's conspiracy to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom was about to be executed, that was when the king (unable to sleep one night) called for the chronicles and read about Mordecai's good deeds. His reward was promotion for Mordecai, and God used that opportunity to deliver His people in exile from the evil plans of Haman who was himself hanged in the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai [**Esth., Chaps 6-9**]. So, we should not expect man's reward but God's.

*As long as we remain in our human flesh on earth, we shall be torn between doing it man's way and God's way. Whatever route we choose, we shall reap what we sow. However, it is better to sow in the Spirit and reap everlasting life than to sow in the flesh and reap corruption. To sow in the Spirit is to bear one another's burdens without expecting man's reward and without being tired of doing good. In the end, we shall reap according to God's plan for us. That is Paul's message for us in this week's study.*

**3. Conclusion: Burdened by sin, go to Jesus!**

As we number our remaining days here on earth, sin remains our main burden, for all have sinned and come short of God's glory [**Rom. 3: 23**]. No matter the help from family and church, the burden remains primarily ours. ***There is only one Person, the Lord Jesus Himself, who can help us out of it. He is the only High Priest who can empathise with our weaknesses, having been tempted as we are and yet without sin. [Heb. 4: 15-16].*** Are you ready to come boldly to Him so as to obtain mercy and grace in this hour of your need? He is the **ONLY** way to His Father. It is time to claim your mansion in His Father's house [**Jn 14: 1-6**].

Cast your burdens on Jesus. He is the greatest burden bearer ever. Let Him bear yours for you. But will you let Him?