

July 20, 2008

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Fulfilling the Law of Christ – Bearing One Another's Burdens*

Galatians 5:25 – 6:5

Paul concludes chapter 5 with this admonition: *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.* Galatians 5:25 And we saw in chapter 5 just what Paul meant when he said to walk by the Spirit. **Walking by the Spirit means that we are actively engaged in killing sin.** Paul puts the whole concept of walking by the Spirit in the arena of conflict between the flesh – where sin reigns; and the Spirit – where Christ reigns. *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.* Galatians 5:16 There are two conflicting desires within the believer – one rooted in the flesh – the other in the Spirit which indwells us. **The flesh has the principal aim of pleasing itself – the Spirit has the principal aim of pleasing God – and there will never be peace between the two.** There is never a time for coasting in the Christian life. Someone has well said: If you are not going forward – you're going backward. There is no peace treaty, no armistice, no cease-fire between the flesh and the Spirit. If we are not daily putting to death the deeds of the flesh – we're losing the battle.

**We also learned that the first step to killing sin and living in freedom is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit.** It is not enough to just say 'No' to temptation – we need to do that – but you have to do more: you have to direct your mind, your heart, your spiritual focus on the things of the Spirit. And to **set your mind on the things of the Spirit is to set your mind on the word of God and the realities of what it imparts.** And as we set our mind on the word of God – which is, according to Ephesians 6 is the sword of the Spirit – the sword comes in to kill sin – to cut it off – to sever the life-line that feeds the deeds of the flesh.

**To walk by the Spirit also means that we recognize our weakness in the flesh** – our proneness to wander from God – our profound inability to keep His law – and with humility of heart and mind lean into the things of the Spirit with all our energy. It is recognizing that although Christ won the war for our freedom on the cross, the battle against lust, greed and pride still rages within – and we dare not let down our guard for a moment. Humility is having an accurate estimate of yourself in the face of God. It is knowing that apart from God's grace we are all worthy of hell. Martin Luther said, *'God accepts no one except the abandoned, makes no one healthy except the sick, gives no one sight except the blind, brings no one to life except the dead, makes no one pious except sinners, makes no one wise except the foolish, and in short, has mercy upon no one except the wretched, and gives no one grace except those who have not grace.'* Martin Luther **Those who know God necessarily have a humble estimate of themselves – and those who know themselves cannot be proud.**

So Paul goes on to say, *Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.* Galatians 5:26 **The opposite of walking by the Spirit in humility is to live according to our prideful flesh** – Paul says 'becoming boastful'. And the word Paul uses here is a compound of two words – one of which means 'empty' and the other 'appearance' – which gives this word the meaning of **'being conceited without cause'**. It is a self-conceit that has no basis in reality and what comes out is boasting. Like the woman who went to her pastor and confessed, *'Pastor, I have a besetting sin, and I need your help. When I come to church on Sunday – I look around and I can't help thinking I'm the prettiest girl in the congregation. I know I ought not think that, but I can't help it.'* The pastor replied, *"Young lady, don't worry about it. In your case it's not a sin. It's just a horrible mistake."*

Paul also says that **the opposite of walking by the Spirit is to challenge one another.** The word means to provoke, or irritate. **It means that we know how to push one another's buttons.** We **are** supposed to provoke one another – to love and good deeds, not irritate one another. *let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds* Hebrews 10:24 says.

And he says that **the opposite of walking by the Spirit is to be full of envy.** And this word has connotations of having ill will or malice toward others – harboring grudges against one another. It is a condition of not having what you want – seeing others that have it – and not wanting them to have it as well.

D.L. Moody once told the fable of an eagle who was envious of another eagle that could fly better than he could. One day the bird met a hunter with a bow and arrow and said to him, "I wish you would bring down that eagle up there." The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow. So the envious eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The first eagle pulled out another feather, then another—until he had lost so many that he himself couldn't fly. The archer then turned around, and killed the helpless bird. **Envy rarely harms the object of its desire – rather it turns around and kills the owner.**

**All of these things, boasting, envying, pushing each other's buttons, come from the pit of pride** – the self-conceit that considers myself first. Pride, self-exaltation, self-reliance has been at the root of human sin since Adam and Eve went down the road of wanting to be God instead of trusting God. And it is the cause of every moral failure in the world and in the church. So after Paul shows us what walking by the Spirit is not – he continues to expand on the theme of walking by the Spirit. And the central point of these five verses in chapter six is verse 2: *Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.* Galatians 6:2

Walking by the Spirit means that we are actively engaged in killing sin – **and it means that we are bearing one another's burdens.** If we are bearing one another's burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ which says – **'Love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself'**. Bearing the load for each other is exactly opposite of boasting, envying, and pushing each other's buttons. The word for 'burden' here means 'a weight or a load' and it suggests an affliction or oppression or struggle. So bearing one another's burdens means that when we see a brother or sister struggling or oppressed – weighed down with some burden – notice that and step in to help. Don't let them be crushed. Don't let their faith get shipwrecked. Don't be like the scribes and Pharisees of whom Jesus said, *'They bind heavy burdens hard to bare and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.'* Matthew 23:4 Don't be like those guys – instead help shoulder the burden.

However, we tend to think of this verse completely out of context – as though this were some sort of command in a list of commands. And we think of burdens here as sickness, unemployment, loneliness, rejection, death of a loved one, and so on. And those really are burdens we ought to bear as well. But if you look at the context – you understand that the burden Paul is talking about helping to shoulder is specific: *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass,* Galatians 6:1a The word Paul uses is translated elsewhere as sins, faults, and offenses, and it has the connotation of deviating or falling from the truth. In plain language it means **to fall where you should have stood upright.** And so bearing one another's burdens has to do with **helping to shoulder the burden of our brother or sister when they fall.**

A believer who has fallen into sin – the word Paul uses is caught or overtaken – needs help. And Paul says *you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness* Galatians 6:1b Paul is not saying that only those who are spiritual giants need to help bear these burdens. When he says *you who are spiritual,* he is talking about those who are walking by the Spirit. If you are walking by the Spirit – you are actively engaged in killing sin and have not been overtaken by it, and so you are in a position to help.

**Those who are walking by the Spirit are to bear the burden by coming alongside to restore the one who has been overtaken by the deceitfulness of sin.** The word 'restore' here means to make things right. This word is the one used for repairing nets that are torn. Torn nets are useless – they can't do anything – and torn nets are not thrown away – instead they are repaired – brought back to usefulness.

In the book of Hebrews, in the context of the discipline of God, the writer comes at this from a different angle: *'Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.'* Hebrews 12:12-15

When, in His mercy, the discipline of the Lord comes to interrupt our sinful course, we need those around us to lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees. At the point of conviction and confession and repentance, we need to be surrounded by the strength of our brothers and sisters and healed – not thrown away. When our brother sins, we are not to look the other way – we are not to say, *'Too bad for you – good luck'*. We are to confront the sin, and bear with our brother and get under their load – the load of consequences and guilt and shame – and shoulder the burden.

**The consequences of not bearing one another's burdens are profound.** They affect not only the one who is overtaken by the sin – but also those around him. When God's disciplinary action comes into someone's life – there is the very real possibility that they will be tempted to become bitter, and complain and rail against the circumstances, against God, against those who have confronted him. And this bitterness has the effect of spreading to everyone around him. Those who are spiritual are to see to it that no one who is caught in sin falls short of the grace of God – that no one fails to make it to the throne of grace – that a root of bitterness does not spring up and infect others.

We understand that we can do nothing to take care of sin and its consequences – only Christ can save us and restore us and revive us. But we are called to admonish, rebuke, and warn the sinning one of the attitudes and habits and actions that are wrong, and lead them to the throne of grace. Bear one another's burdens – **take the time and effort it requires to help your brother or sister recognize their sin and lead them to the throne of grace for timely help.** It may seem an easier thing for you to help someone bear the burden of sickness, joblessness, loneliness, rejection, death – than to bear the burden of confronting sin in a brother's life. But the consequences of sin are far more harmful than the consequences of any of those things. If we love one another – we will bear this kind of burden. One of my favorite quotes on the nature of love is from Dick Foth: **'Love is the accurate estimate and adequate supply of another's need'. If we really love our brother and sister – we will confront them in their sin as well as care for them in their trouble.**

And notice the qualifier: *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.* 'Gentleness' here is a quality of mind and heart that recognizes our own failures and fallings – it recognizes that apart from the grace of God we are a heartbeat away from the same fall. It is a caution to deal gently with those who have stumbled and carefully lay out a course of action that leads to restoration – not condemnation.

Thankfully, Paul gives a strong warning here to those who would do this from a position of pride and arrogance: *each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.* Galatians 6:1c John Piper once said: **'Remember that you are a basket case of sin apart from God's gracious Spirit.'** *John Piper.* We are all vulnerable. Don't think that you do not have within yourself the capability of falling prey to the same sin that others have. **'There but for the grace of God, go I'** should be our attitude.

In the early 60's, Adolf Eichmann stood trial in Israel for his horrific crimes of the Jewish Holocaust during WWII as its principal mastermind. During that trial he was confronted by a string of former concentration camp prisoners as witnesses. One was a small, little man named Yehiel Dinur, who had miraculously escaped death in Auschwitz. On his day to testify, Dinur entered the courtroom and stared at the man in the bulletproof glass booth – the man who had murdered Dinur's friends, personally executed a number of Jews, and presided over the slaughter of millions more. As the eyes of the two men met – victim and murderous tyrant – the courtroom fell silent, filled with the tension of the confrontation. But no one was prepared for what happened next. Yehiel Dinur began to shout and sob, collapsing to the floor, weeping. As he later explained in a riveting 60 Minutes interview, it was because Eichmann was not the demonic personification of evil that Dinur had expected. Rather, he was an ordinary man, just like anyone else. And in that one instant, Dinur came to a stunning realization that sin and evil are the human condition. "I was afraid about myself," Dinur said. "I saw that I am capable to do this ... exactly like he." **"Eichmann is in all of us."**

Paul says it this way: *For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* Galatians 6:3 That is, if you think you are above the same level of depredation or depravity you see in someone else – take another look in the mirror.

*But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.* Galatians 6:4. That is, in measuring the extent and value of your spiritual growth, don't look at someone else as your standard of measurement. Don't get swollen with spiritual pride when you see a brother fall. There is something in us that gets a little puffed up when we see someone stumbling and falling in an area where we have stood strong. Paul says 'Stop feeding your pride by comparing yourself with the condition of your brother. Don't measure your moral achievement or spiritual maturity with the failure of your brother.'

*For each one will bear his own load.* Galatians 6:5 That is, when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ – it won't be your brother in the dock – it is just going to be you and Jesus. When the final bell is rung and the tests are handed in and we are all measured by the law of Christ, there won't be anyone to point to and say, 'But I wasn't any worse than Bob over there'. No one is going to lighten the load by being worse than you – you will bear your own load.

Which is good reason to bear one another's burden down here. **Lift up your brother's hands that are drooping – strengthen his weak knees – help the joints to heal and not be twisted – work hard at being at peace and walking in holiness – see to it that you are leading one another to the throne of grace.**

My prayer is that Summit Christian Fellowship would exude an atmosphere of love so great that sin is confronted – and healing flows like a river. I pray that we would be a church where no one is afraid to tell their story for fear of rejection or condemnation – but that we would be leading one another to the throne of grace. I pray that we would be a church where pride is swallowed up in humility and love covers all. I pray that we would truly bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

*Our gracious God and wonderful Redeemer,*

*Grant that we would bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the Law of Christ. We sin – grant that we would not cease to grieve because of it – never be content and think we have reached perfection – but rather set our hearts and minds on the things of the Spirit and kill sin where it raises its ugly head. Give us we pray the grace to be holy, kind, gentle with one another in our weakness – to live for You and not for ourselves – to drink in Your transforming word and live entirely for Your glory. Teach us to live in holy humility with one another – to give reproof and correction in the spirit of love – to humbly accept the same that it might cause us to run from sin and flee unrighteousness and generate a passion for purity and a heart for holiness – and cause us to live and love as those who have been made glad in God – living to make others glad in You too, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.*

***May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto You.  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.***