

WHAT TO DO WITH LIFE'S BURDENS

Do you simply feel weighted down with responsibilities, cares, worries or uncertainties? Maybe you feel the weight of other people's burdens—those of people you deeply care about. Burdens can get you down if you don't know what to do with them. The Bible actually teaches us three things that we are to do with our burdens. What seems strange to some is that these three exhortations seem to contradict or be in opposition to each other. For example:

Galatians 6:5 "For every man shall bear his own burden."

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

Psalms 55:22 "Cast thy burden upon the Lord..."

So, in one place, I'm told to bear it myself; in another, I'm told to take someone's burden and bear it for them; in yet another, I'm told that instead of carrying it myself, or giving it to someone else, I'm to cast it upon the Lord. This is one of those alleged contradictions of the Bible, but it's actually no contradiction at all. Instead, it is a very complete and beautiful lesson about the kinds of burdens we all have to bear, and how there is always a way to deal with them. What you'll find when you carefully look at these three passages is that the Lord is talking about three different kinds of burdens. In **Galatians 6:2**, the Greek word that Paul uses is *baros*, which means *load*. In other words, it could be talking about a load of difficulty, maybe sorrow or pain or tragedy or trial. We'll notice in the context exactly what Paul is talking about here, but he is literally saying that we are to help carry one's load. Then, in **Galatians 6:5**, he uses a different Greek word, *phortion* or *pack*. The two words are close enough in meaning to allow them to be translated to the same English word. There's really not much difference between the two, but it seems that Paul is delineating between those burdens of personal responsibility and those that we are able to help one another carry. It's almost a paradoxical teaching in which Paul is saying that we are to consciously carry our own burdens, but when we cannot, when and where we can, we are to help our brother carry his burdens. Then there are those burdens which neither you nor I can carry, so we must give those to the Lord. What's the difference? Well, there are burdens to bear, and then there are burdens to share. Let's begin by looking at Paul's instruction in **Galatians 6:5**.

"For every man shall bear his own burden."

There are burdens that are non-transferrable. In other words, you are the only person who can bear those burdens. They pertain to the duties and responsibilities that I have to God and other people. Now, others may come to my aid and support me or bear me up in my weakness, and they may encourage me, but ultimately, here's what it boils down to: I am accountable for the life that I live before God, and nobody else. We constantly need to be reminded of that.

Romans 14:12 "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

That is a sobering fact. In the great Day of Judgment, I'm going to have to take MY turn before that judgment bar, and account for MY life, just like you will account for yours. Here in Romans 14, Paul is dealing with a unique aspect of our relationship to one another. He is warning about living in such a way that might cause someone else to stumble or sin. That is a very serious thing, that by my actions, my decisions or my words, I might lead someone who is weaker in their faith to do something that to them is wrong, therefore defiling their conscience and causing them to be lost. Paul says that we have to be very circumspect about that, and be careful to guard our influence. But in the end, the conclusion of the whole matter is that we ALL have to give an account to God of the lives that we have lived in relation to God and other people.

Philippians 2:12 “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

When Paul says to bear or shoulder my own burden, or as the word appears in verse 5, *phortion*, he is using a word that commentator William Barclay said ‘refers to the pack that every soldier is to carry without complaint.’ I think that is a pretty good word picture. In other words, my moral and spiritual obligations to God are MINE and I can't give those to someone else to bear for me. I can't believe or have faith in God for somebody else. Did you know that your mother's faith is not going to get you to Heaven? Your granddaddy's life of faith and service might be well and wonderful, but that's not going to do YOU any good when you stand before Jesus Christ. You might say, “Well, I had such godly parents and I was raised in a Christian home!” or, “My grandfather was a minister!” or, “My uncle is a missionary!” or, “My brother goes to church all of the time and has such a strong faith in God!” There are a lot of people who bank in those types of statements and assurances, and all of that is wonderful if it's true. But what does it do for YOU? If anything, it makes it an even greater shame for you to be lost! You see, you won't be judged based on the faith or religion of your parents, grandparents or anybody else. The question is: What do YOU believe? How are YOU living today? What is YOUR relationship to the Lord Jesus? Have YOU been baptized for the remission of YOUR sins? Do YOU go to worship like the Bible tells you to in **Hebrews 10:25**? Are YOU living a holy and righteous life? We ALL have a *personal responsibility* to attend to our own salvation. And that salvation comes by my own faith in Christ by God's word, and by my own obedience to His will. Nobody can believe for you, nobody can repent for you, nobody can confess Christ for you, nobody can be baptized for you, nobody can go to church for you, give for you, serve for you, minister for you, pray for you, study for you, etc...EVERY MAN must bear his own burden of salvation. So there are burdens to bear.

But then, Paul tells us that there are burdens to share.

Galatians 6:2 “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

In other words, though we are shouldering our own responsibilities of obeying the Lord and serving the Lord and so forth, sometimes we stumble beneath those burdens. We are human beings and sometimes we grow weak or unsteady, so Paul says that it is then that we are to lovingly step in and help our struggling brother to bear his burden. If you look at the context surrounding this commandment, you'll see that that is exactly what Paul is talking about: the brother who, in his human weakness, is overtaken

in a fault or by a shortcoming of some sort. In fact, to really see what Paul is saying, we need to look back at the last verse of Galatians 5 and read on into chapter 6 a couple of verses.

Galatians 5:26 – Galatians 6:2 “Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Now, put all of that together, and what the apostle Paul seems to be saying is that there were some in the church who were prideful, conceited, self-centered, full of self-righteousness, who looked at the failing of someone else with contempt. And while they thought that they were something, they were blinded by their own pride and self-glory and they weren’t very mature in the faith themselves. They were measuring themselves by Christians who they deemed as weaker, and in a twisted way perhaps finding some satisfaction and sense of superiority by pointing out the failings of others. I think we sit next to people who are a little bit like that in the church even today. If we’re not careful, we look at the weak with contempt, and we might get a false sense of our own strength.

By the way, Paul is talking about the person here who is trying to live for Christ. He’s trying to bear his burdens, but he is overcome by some sin. He is not talking about the infidel or rebellious apostate, rather someone who is struggling to live right. That’s what is meant here by the phrase, “*overtaken in a fault.*” It’s a person who is taken by surprise or suddenly overcome by a moral or spiritual obstacle in a time of weakness or vulnerability. Some people simply struggle in their walk of faith, and Paul says not to look at that person with pride or contempt. Don’t come down on him/her like a hammer and mercilessly excoriate them for their failure. But, he also doesn’t say to ignore or overlook the fault. That is important to note. He doesn’t say to excuse or rationalize or condone the fault. Here is where the “burden-bearing” comes in! Paul says not to crush him, but rather to help him. Not the carnal and self-willed man, but the man who has himself humbly yielded to God, let HIM step in and restore that weak brother, and do so with such humility and gentleness that he considers that he himself may stumble and be in need of correction and aid along the way.

Now, when Paul says to restore him, that may very well mean that you have to point out his fault because he may be ignorant of his fault. He may be overtaken in it because he’s not aware of it. He may be blind to it. He may not have the developed understanding of God’s Word through experience and study that you or some other brother may have. Contrary to the spirit of our age and all of the clichés that you hear in religion today, it is NOT unloving to correct somebody who is guilty of sin. That is NOT what Jesus was talking about when He said, “Judge not that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). He is talking about judging with a hypocritical judgment. He’s not talking about correcting somebody who is guilty of sin in love, putting them on the right path or pointing out their sin. In fact, the worse thing I can do for somebody is to let them continue in sin without trying to get them to repent of it. The ‘how’ is what Paul is telling us to be careful about. We ARE to correct and restore, but we are to do it with meekness—not pride or anger. Restore, not crush, humiliate or look down upon. Paul says to lovingly, tenderly and meekly correct him. And that correction may mean that I need to have my fault pointed

out. That's part of bearing one another's burdens, and I need to have the humility to accept correction and to enlist the help of those who may be more mature and knowledgeable of God's Word.

But here's the point that I want us to carry away from this: You and I cannot live the Christian life without the help and influence of somebody else. Somebody has to help you carry your burdens, and that's part of the beauty of the church, the family of God, the body of Christ: the fellowship, mutual aid and accountability, and even the discipline that we receive as part of a local church. Now, somebody says, "Well, I don't go to church because those people just judge the way I live and listen, nobody's going to judge MY lifestyle. Nobody's going to tell ME what to do!" Friend, have you ever thought about the fact that we have a burden to bear for each other? That is, to try to get one another to Heaven! Yes, there are prideful, hypocritical and hyper-judgmental people, sometimes in the church. That is unfortunate. But have you stopped to realize that most people want to see other people live for Jesus and be saved?

Some of us could use a good lesson on how to *give* criticism and offer correction, but at the same time, some of us could also use a good lesson on *receiving* spiritual correction. The Lord designed the church as a fellowship of believers who, though they are bearing their own burdens and working out their own salvation, they also able to step in and help bear one another's burdens. Brothers and sisters in a local church can help us stand up under temptation. They can reinforce us and help us to better understand God's Word and His will. They can strengthen us and lift us up when our faith is weak and challenged. They can awaken our conscience when it becomes dull. And there are other burdens that we are to help one another carry: those burdens of life that can get us down and challenge us, whether they are physical or financial or emotional or spiritual burdens. That is all part of the wonderful fabric and fellowship of the local church! Carrying each other's burdens may not only mean correction and intervention in spiritual weakness, but it also means physical care in times of sickness, comfort and encouragement in times of sorrow. It may mean help with life's overwhelming tasks, lest all of that crushes us and chokes out our faith. There is a world of opportunities to serve your brother. You and I have a responsibility to God, and it is a responsibility that only we can keep: a spiritual burden of faith and faithfulness that we have to carry for ourselves. But there are burdens that we can help one another carry, and Paul says that when we do so, we "**fulfill the law of Christ.**" (Galatians 6:2) In other words, helping a weak and struggling brother is the essence of the law of Christ Jesus, which plainly tells us that we are to treat our brother as we ourselves would want to be treated.

So, if you're not living for Jesus, you've got to take up your cross and start carrying it. You've got a duty to faith and obedience that nobody else can carry for you, and you need to realize your responsibility before God. Understand that nobody is going to answer for you. You will answer for your own life. But then, you need to seek the fellowship of Christ's church and you need to be part of the local body where others can help you and you can help others bear the burdens that we cannot bear alone.

But then, thirdly, there are burdens that are too great for you and me to bear for ourselves. They are even too great for somebody else to help us bear. The Word of God gives us a wonderful prescription for what to do with those pressing burdens of life.

Psalms 55:22 “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

What kind of burden is the Psalmist talking about here? He’s not talking about the burdens that we can carry for ourselves. God will never do for man what he has empowered man to do for himself. He’s not even talking about the burdens that we can help one another carry. He’s talking about those burdens of life that are so crushing and overwhelming that we would buckle beneath them. Burdens with which there is nothing else to do but to “cast it upon the Lord.” The apostle Peter beautifully recalled those words in his epistle:

I Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

There’s not a more wonderful statement in this frightening and uncertain world than that: “He careth for you.” Cast your care on him, Peter says.

“What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear!

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Pay attention to the third verse of this wonderful old hymn:

“Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.

In His arms He’ll take and shield thee. Thou wilt find a solace there.”

You know what the great hymnist was telling us? When there is no one else to carry your burdens, when friends forsake, or when the burden is simply too great for others to take or for us to bear ourselves, he says, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." I truly pity the man who doesn't know the Lord Jesus Christ. Life places burdens on all of us: sorrow, tragedy, affliction, loss, disappointment, death...all of those are common realities. They all come, at one time or another, to everybody. The rich and the poor, the old and the young, and they also come to the person who is saved as well as the person who is lost. The Bible says that God sends the rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Friend, when the world runs out of answers, when other people desert and forsake you, when you hit a wall and there is nowhere to go, the Christian has a wonderful consolation! He can cast his burden upon the Lord! You can't do that if you're not living for the Lord. You can't go running to God for help when you get in trouble and forget about Him when you're not in trouble. But there is a wonderful blessing in being God's child, in a special, unique way, in Christ Jesus.

You've got a burden to bear, a cross to take up. But when that burden is too heavy, you've got the church and your brethren who will help you, in love, to bear the burdens of life! And when that burden is too tall and the valley is too deep and dark to go through, you can cast your burden on the Father, and He'll not let you fall. That is God's wonderful prescription for the Christian, and what to do with life's burdens.