

## Life Together (2) Galatians 6:2 Sharing the Burden

We are in the second week of our series called Life Together. Last time we saw that the church of Jesus Christ is a Body of Differents. We are a diverse bunch of people and the more diverse the better because it shows the power of the gospel to impact us and change us and unite us. We saw as Paul says that in Christ “*there is neither Jew nor greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (3:28). In Christ we are equal, there is no hierarchy or distinction on these things. Yes we will continue to have different identities on earth but the most important one and the one that trumps all else is that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and that supernatural family will extend into eternity. It is good therefore if we try and get to know one another and respect one another and that may involve moving out of the little circles we move in. While there is a limit to the number of people we will get to know very well we find that as we widen the circles a bit it has a positive benefit to the whole body of believers. I suggested a couple of things we could do to increase our knowledge and love of one another – maybe sit in a different pew occasionally and engage with someone different; or on Palm Sunday invite or be invited for lunch with someone you don’t know too well. A sheet will be available next week for names.

You see when we come into the NT there is a bit of a sea change in the terms which are used for the gathering of God’s people. It is less a group of individuals and more a body – body life is important and emphasised. It is also worth noting that family terms are much more common to describe God’s people in the NT – God is Father, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The church as *institution* is played down and the church as *family* is played up. I suppose one of the sad developments of the world church over the years as it has grown is that it can lose the family feel and it becomes more of an institution. With institutions you have hierarchies and structures and administration and rules and so on.

In this series I want to encourage us to think more upon the church, and this particular local expression of church especially, as family. Yes we are quite a big family but we need to think of ourselves as that. This idea of church as a family resonates with the current upcoming generation. There is a fear and suspicion of institutions among post-moderns so it is important that we emphasise church as family. This is not easy because many of us have a default setting that has built up over the years that church is something you go to rather than something you are.

This means that the organic connection between you and your brothers and sisters is quite weak. Church is somewhere you go to, sit down, engage in a service and then exit as quickly as possible. That is a very poor representation of what I believe God wants us to be – we are family. In Acts 2:42-47 we have an insight to the early church and the bonds of fellowship and sharing which meant the church experience was very different to what we have and theirs was so much richer but also more sacrificial. Love requires sacrifices of our individualism, which I mentioned as a possible idol of our times. We need to beware of individualism and institutionalism. These things kill family spirit and doing life together well.

So today and in subsequent weeks we are going to look at the nitty gritty of what that means.

I want to use Galatians 6:1-10 as the springboard of our thoughts today and in particular verse 2 which says *“Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.”* We will ask and hopefully answer – 3 questions today

1. What are these burdens and how do they differ from the load referred to in v.5 which we are meant to bear ourselves? We will also see that we are both needy and needed as we answer this question.

2. Why are we meant to carry each other’s burdens – is it not enough to pray to Jesus? We will see that it is a case of both/and not either or. We need to pray but we also need to confess and comfort one another. We are not above this.

3. Are we really equipped to care for each other? Should we not leave it to the professionals?

1. What are these burdens Paul refers to in v.2? Well they can be very broad – everything from worries about our jobs, to concerns about our children to temptations that we are facing or sins in our lives that we are toying with and giving in to. The word burden here means a heavy load – something that is weighing heavily on our hearts and minds. I think also if anything Paul is mainly, though not exclusively, thinking of a moral burden. I think if you take v.2 in its context of v.1 Paul has just mentioned about when we are caught in sin and how we should deal with each other gently in trying to restore a person.

So if we have committed some sin or have compromised ourselves morally in some way that can certainly be a burden – it weighs heavily on us. If God is in our lives then doing wrong things should not sit easily with us, our conscience should be troubled. It should trouble us and the more mature we are spiritually we should be able to confess that to God and sometimes to others. We will look in another sermon in more detail at what happens when we fall into sin and how we deal with that and how to help others deal with it.

As we read through v.1-5 you may have wondered as I did for many years about the seeming contradiction between v.2 and v.5. In one Paul says carry each other’s burdens and in the other each one should carry his own load. It would seem strange for Paul to contradict himself within the space of one paragraph. Well the burden means a heavy weight with which you need help and the load is the normal responsibilities that come with life. It is the difference between a backpack and a 40 kg suitcase. We are meant to each have a backpack with life’s responsibilities and we make that our business to carry that load. Now occasionally we may undergo some trauma, an injury, a bereavement, a crisis and we find it hard to even put on that backpack for a period and we need others to step in and carry even that back pack for us; but in normal life, which is hard enough at the best of times, we take that responsibility. That is what it is to be an adult. There is something wrong

if people have to carry our everyday responsibilities for a very long time. We can play the victim and be too needy.

Sadly adolescence seems to be extending and fewer seem to want to take up that back pack. But when we are weighed down with a heavy, heavy suitcase we will need help. That is what Paul is speaking about here in v.2.

The burdens of life can hit us quite often. Life is hard and messy and in particular when we make bad decisions morally, or give in to temptation that can really weigh us down. These especially require help from others

The Bible says that sin is a problem in all of our lives – no-one is exempt. We are a needy people when it comes to the impact of sin – none of us are above its temptations. Be careful the Bible says when you think you are standing firm for then you can fall. God has created us to be dependent creatures, dependent on him but also dependent on each other – we need help more than we realise. We forget this sometimes in church life to our detriment. We can be quite good at praying to God and asking for his help but Paul here is encouraging us to do more than that.

2. Why are we meant to carry each other's burdens – is it not enough to pray to Jesus? We will see that it is a case of both/and not either or. We need to pray but we also need to confess and comfort one another.

It is good to pray to Jesus. There are many scriptures that encourage us to go to God and he can bring us supernatural comfort. Ps.55:22 *"Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you."* In 1 Peter 2:5 it says *"Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you"*. Jesus said *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest"*. (Mt11:28). This is true and we find immense comfort as we bring these things to God but we can also bring them to each other. It's both/ and, not either or. We need God and as someone said we also need God with skin on. This is the way that God has designed us to be – to be dependent on other human beings.

God bears our sin once for all upon his Son Jesus and deals with the penalty for that sin past, present and future, but we also can bear the impact of each other's sins as we help each other through life. God has designed it that his body the church is meant to help deal with some of the burden of living in a sinful world. We see this lovely balance in 2 Cor.7:5-6 as Paul admits he is struggling where he says *"But God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus"*. Paul received comfort from God as he prayed, but he also received comfort from Titus whom God provided for him. God can bring comfort into our heart directly by His Spirit and also through his people as they come alongside us. This is how God works – this is why the body of Jesus is here on earth in the form of his church.

So when we are struggling we need to do two things – pray to God and confess to one another as well and find the help of his people. This requires a certain vulnerability, it is hard

for us to do this but it is a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. Humility is always a sign of maturity.

In v.3 Paul says *“If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing then he deceives himself”*. Now we could take this in a number of ways. Perhaps he means do not consider yourself above bearing someone else’s burden. Don’t elevate yourself by comparing yourself to another and saying I am not going to bother helping that person - I am above that. Well actually you are nothing, a sinner who is not better than anyone else.

Or it could also mean this - don’t think that you are above sharing your problems with someone else. You should not be above being vulnerable and saying you are struggling. We need to care for one another and we need to open ourselves up to be cared for. Sometimes the latter is more difficult. It is easier offering help to others – it can make you look like you have no problems or worries. Care and be cared for – this is life together – this is what we were made for.

3. Am I qualified to care for another? A major plank of the ethos of this church is every member ministry. A major part of my job is to help to equip you to do the work of ministry (Eph.4:12-13). One of the problems with life today is the rise of the specialist. Now I know in the world of medicine we have specialists – eye specialists, nose specialists, feet specialists, heart specialists and so on and there is a temptation when we get into life’s problems and spiritual problems that we look for a specialist to deal with it and we are all pretty much generalists but we are better equipped than we realise. The church is meant to be 99% volunteers.

When we trust in Jesus we are equipped with the Holy Spirit and with the wisdom of God and the word of God. As we open ourselves to God’s Spirit and God’s Word we are equipped to minister and help and bear one another’s burdens. Ed Welch says *“The wisdom of God is condensed in Christ and him crucified. If you know that wisdom you are eminently qualified to help others. And there is just one other qualification. It is this: you are an ordinary person. God has determined that run of the mill people do most of his work – not professionals, not experts...What a fine strategy this is. If the beautiful, rich and talented were the ones with the spiritual power, we would revert to class structures that have cursed humanity from the beginning. The haves would lord it over the have nots...but when ordinary people are used in ways they did not even know, then God is honoured...when you in your weakness, move toward others, you honour God and are more powerful than you know.”*

Now if we have a sore tooth we go to a dentist, if we have a physical pain we can go to a dr, if we have depression we can receive specialised help. I have talked enough to drs to know that many of the problems that they are dealing with have roots in loneliness, sin, anxiety, bad habits, and many things actually that have spiritual causes and which could be dealt with by a loving group of Christian people helping them to carry the burden. So many issues we have also arise out of our failure as disciples and we don’t need specialists –we just

maybe need to confess, to repent, to share and to receive godly wisdom from a brother or sister in Christ and we will explore this later in this series. That's the medicine we need sometimes – not specialists.

Now there can be deep seated and complex spiritual issues that need worked through by those who have some special training but in my experience they are in the minority. A lot of stuff can be worked through with a godly brother or sister who listens to us and who keeps applying the word of God in a gentle manner in the power of the Holy Spirit. Listening is powerful.

But we need to know one another before we can do life together better. We need to move towards one another and have that concern for one another and we will tease out what that looks like in the next weeks. We also need to respect one another so that if a brother or sister approaches us and says is everything ok, you seem out of sorts, or a bit angry about something - that we do not dismiss them and feel that's none of their business but rather open up and allow them in. This again is a sign that the Spirit is working in us and we should be open.

This is why we have prayer ministry, this is why we have Laser Groups. Here is practical ways of moving into the sharing of our burdens. What is prayer ministry? It can be offered at church or in your home? Our leaflet says prayer ministry is simply following the example of Jesus in praying for healing of body, mind and spirit for all who ask.

As Jesus demonstrated, and as we see early on in the life of the church, preaching and teaching were often accompanied by prayer for healing. We also try to follow this example to minister in love and ask God to bring freedom, healing and truth. We believe that Christ is our role model and we minister in a Christ-like manner so that "we decrease and Christ will increase".

When you come for prayer ministry we pray alongside you under the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit. We pray and usually minister in twos - one person listening for any prompting from God.

Ed Welch again says that as we move towards one another, as we care, as we listen, as we speak, as we see the good in each other and also the struggles, as we get into longer conversations, as we pray then God works in these ordinary steps. He says *"The risk is that their very ordinariness might cause us to judge them as second rate ways to care for one another. But the truth is that following these steps is powerful enough to reach into souls"*

This is life together. *"Carry each other's burdens, for in doing so we are fulfilling the law of Christ"*.