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Bread of Life Baptist Church
May 29th, 2022

Galatians 5:25 - 6:5

We Need Each Other: Bearing One Another's Burdens in the Church

If I had to pick a favorite book, outside the Bible, it would probably be *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. If you're not familiar with it, it's an allegory of the Christian life, pictured as a chivalrous adventure story. Part I is about a Pilgrim, named Christian, who receives a letter from the King, Jesus Christ, and leaves the City of Destruction to journey towards the Celestial City - the City of Heaven. Part of what makes the book so exciting is that it's filled with fast-paced adventure, as Christian faces one dangerous challenge after another. He falls into traps of despair, fights the dragon of his sinful flesh, and is even imprisoned by the terrible Giant Doubt. And the Pilgrimage is so dangerous precisely because he's going at it mostly alone; he only gets out of these predicaments with the help of others.

But then, when you get to the second half of the book, in part II, the pace slows down a bit. You see, while Part I focuses more on the hardships of walking the Christian life alone, Part II focuses on a *Christian community* of several people - a picture of the local church! - all making the pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City *together*. And though they travel the exact same road that Christian did, along with many of the same dangers, this time, it is *much, much* easier for them! For example, right after Christian begins his journey, he quickly falls into the Bog of Depression and discouragement. His burden weighs him down and he can't make it through on his own, he's starts sinking! But then, just in time, someone comes along and helps him out. In Part II, when the group comes to this bog, it's much less dramatic. Before they step foot into it, someone in the group spots a pathway of stones and they cross it safely. As they go on, the group grows; they even get a stronger pilgrim, named Great Heart - a brave knight who functions like a pastor for the group. Later on, they come to the dreaded castle where the terrible Giant Doubt lives. In the first book, Christian has his worst fall here - he's trapped in the dungeon of Doubt and cannot get out on his own. But when the whole group encounters it, before anyone can fall prey, they all rush in, slay the giant, and unlock the prison, freeing all the prisoners from doubt to come back to the path of Faith.

And so it is throughout: where some in the group are weak, other Pilgrims are strong, and vice versa; they all have different strengths and weaknesses and are able to help each other along

the path - they *bear each other's burdens* and so help each other reach the City of Heaven together safely. For that reason, Part II might seem a little more boring than the first; there's much less conflict, everything seems much more easy-going! BUt that's just the point: it shows a beautiful picture of the Christian church - of our *need* for each other in the Christian life. You see, the second time around, it's easier because it's not just a lone, isolated Christian trying to make his way through life towards Heaven; this time, there's a whole group, a community of pilgrims - a church! - helping each other along. When one or two of them are weak, the others are strong; as a Christian community, they *bear one another's spiritual burdens* so that no one falls behind. It's a beautiful picture with a clear point: we're not able to live the Christian life alone, but instead, *we need each other* - we need our local church. Church isn't a place you go to; church is a *community, a family* of believers committed to *walking together* towards Heaven, bearing one another's burdens along the way! Every single Christian needs to be part of a church!

And this isn't just a message from *Pilgrim's Progress* - it comes straight from the Bible. the Bible. Sometimes, in our pride, we begin to think that we don't really need help from other people - not even spiritually. We start to think that we can live the Christian life on our own just fine. But the Bible has no concept of lone-wolf, isolated, individual Christianity. Instead, it assumes that the Christian life will take place *in the context and community of a local church*. We can't carry out the Christian life, persevere faithfully, or obey all the commands of the Bible without being part of a specific, biblical church family. We see this all over the New Testament. And one such place where we see this clearly is in *Galatians 5:25 - 6:5*.

As we saw last week, in the last passage, all true believers are filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit, being led and empowered to *wage war* against our flesh because of what Christ has done for us. We obey God not to be saved, but because he promises to save us purely by grace! We love others because of how much Christ loves us! In verse 25, Paul then sums up his argument and follows it with a command: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." That is, if we are truly in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, then we are commanded to *walk in step with the Spirit*, living in accordance with the fruit of the Spirit described in vv.22-23. So Paul gives this general exhortation for us and then, throughout the rest of the book in chapter 6, he begins to give us *very specific exhortations* for how we are called to practically "walk by the Spirit" as Christians. Now, we might expect Paul to explain how we are

to “walk in step with the Spirit” as individual Christians; we might expect it to include things like personal holiness, prayer, reading the Bible, and so forth. But what follows is actually a string of practical exhortations that are *focused on the Christian community*, the church. In other words, chapter 6 makes clear that we “walk in step with the Spirit” by living out the fruit of the Spirit *as a Christian community*, loving one another in the context of the local church. We do so by “bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (6:2). So Paul gives clear exhortations for how we should live out the Christian life *together, as a spirit-filled community*. But he also recognizes that one of the greatest threats to the Christian community is our own pride and conceit, leading Paul to warn us of pride on either side of his exhortations for loving one another as a church. Finally, Paul undercuts our pride and underscores how urgent it is that we bear one another’s burdens by reminding us of our individual responsibility before God.

So let’s walk through these practical exhortations that are meant to shape the way we live as a church community and as individual Christians. And since this passage is a list of exhortations, that’s how I’ve worded each of the sermon points today - as exhortations, as commands. But these aren’t *my commands* - I’m not telling anyone what to do - but are simply taken directly from the commands that God is giving us here in this passage. So let’s begin with the first exhortation:

I. Do Not Become Proud or Care About Yourself More Than Others (5:26, 6:3)

Paul begins exhorting us toward living as a Spirit-filled community by first *warning us* against the dangers of pride, in verse 26: “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Pride is poisonous in a community: focusing on ourselves is antithetical to loving one another. Pride is the love of self. Pride leads to “provoking one another.” If we’re full of pride and conceit, then if someone wrongs us, or simply rubs us the wrong way without meaning to, then our pride will keep us from forgiving them and make us bitter. When we care more about ourselves than the other person, we blow up in anger or provoke one another, leading to “strife,” and “division” in the church community.

Pride leads to “envy” and jealousy. If we’re self-absorbed, then we start to believe the lie that we actually *deserve* to be treated better than other people. We start to think we’re *entitled* to what other people have, and we don’t. We start to think we’re *entitled* to being treated a certain way. We start to think we’re *entitled* to positions of prominence and leadership - even in the

church. Imagine you're working hard at work, and over time, pride and conceit start to grow in your heart. You convince yourself that you're the hardest working person there, the best at your job, and you deserve a promotion. But then, when a leadership position opens up, the new guy who was just hired recently gets promoted, instead of you. If you give into the temptation of pride and conceit, then you'll become jealous and envious of that person, even becoming bitter; instead of loving your fellow co-worker and being glad for his promotion, your relationship will be strained, and it might even lead to you becoming a contention and provocative person in the workplace, poisoning the well (or water-cooler) of the office space. The same thing can happen in the church context. If we become puffed up with pride, and begin to think that we *deserve* to be treated or seen a certain way in the church, then this will quickly lead to envy and provoke all kinds of works of the flesh in one another. Such pride poisons the church community, and we must put it to death. Because the gospel is true, we must crucify our flesh and walk by the Spirit.

But pride can also lead in a different direction - pride can cause us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we don't need the help of others. We see this in verse 3; right after calling us to bear one another's burdens, Paul says, "For if anyone thinks he is somethin, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." In other words, pride can deceive us into thinking we don't need to be part of the church community. But this is a lie. Church isn't optional; nor is it something that only *some Christians* need. If we're going to follow Christ, then we're going to need the help of Christ's body - His church; we can't do it alone, we need other Christians to walk with us as we bear each others' burdens. And if we start to think that we're fine on our own outside of a healthy church community, then we're deceiving ourselves and we're full of pride. None of us can do it on our own; our only hope is God's grace! And part of God's grace to us in the Christian life is *the gracious gift of one another, Christ's church*.

So we need to set aside our pride and recognize that we need each other. In fact, we need each other precisely because we all still give in to the flesh and fall into sin - whether it's pride or any other sin. This leads to the next exhortation:

II. Restore One Another in Gentleness when a Believer Falls into Sin (6:1)

The passage continues with verse 1: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." As we saw last week, in 5:16-18, Paul describes the Christian life as a war between the flesh and the Spirit. We're all tempted to sin, and it's even true that we will *continue*

to stumble and fall into sin throughout this life. And yet, this war isn't a losing battle - we're filled with the Holy Spirit, and as we walk by the Spirit, we don't give into the flesh! This means the Christian life is marked by *fighting* sin, and when we do sin, confessing and repenting from it, continuing to cling to Christ, and striving to follow and obey Him in all things. This verse, 6:1, once again recognizes this reality - that in our church community, we will all still stumble into sin - but it also gives us a great encouragement: *we don't fight our sin alone!* In fact, even when we do sin, this verse tells us that the church community is called to gather around us and *restore us with gentleness* back onto the path of faithfulness! AND this is a gracious gift!

There will be moments when believers and fellow church members fall into sin and momentarily stop fighting the fight of faith. Paul instructs us to "restore him in a spirit of gentleness" when this happens. Now, he gives this instruction to "you who are spiritual." I don't think Paul is addressing a spiritual elite within the church, or even those who are mature leaders. When he says "spiritual" here, I think he means those who are filled with the Spirit and who are walking in step with the Spirit (v.25). In other words: genuine Christians, who are part of the church community, are walking by the Spirit through faith, and are fighting the flesh! And that means *all* of us who are true Christians are called to love one another by aiming to *restore* one another if one of us momentarily gives into the flesh and stops fighting. When this happens, we must lovingly go to our brother, gently call him to repentance, remind him of the grace of the gospel, and help him return to the path of walking in step with the Spirit.

In other words, Paul is calling *all of us* to regularly practice church discipline with one another, in love. Jesus describes how this is supposed to work in Matthew 18:15-20. If our brother or sister in the church family is caught in sin, and we know about it, we are to go to him or her, one-on-one without humiliating them, in order to lovingly and gently call them to repentance. If our brother gives into sin and doesn't seem to be repenting and fighting, then we call him to repentance. After all, as we saw last week, from 5:21, those who habitually live in the works of the flesh and do not repent prove that they are not believers and won't be saved unless they do repent and turn back to Christ! So if he still doesn't repent, then Jesus says we go as two or three to him - this is the point where it's probably best to get a pastor within the church involved. And if the brother still doesn't repent, but continues to pursue the flesh and refuses to walk by the Spirit, then we bring it to the whole church - not to shame or humiliate them, but

because we love them, and we want to see them restored! And if he still doesn't repent, then we have to remove him from membership, since we can no longer affirm his faith.

But the second he *does* repent, we eagerly restore our brother! And that's because the goal is *always* repentance and restoration. The word "restore" here is the same one used to "restore" fishing nets, mending any holes in them so that they are able to function and catch fish again; or to "restore" a broken limb, setting the bone back in place after it's been dislocated, restoring it to its proper place and function in the body. This is always our goal for one another, as fellow Christians and church members, when it comes to matters of sin. The goal is to bring the believer back into a place of wholeness and usefulness in the local church body. We don't restore them by shaming or humiliating them or making one another feel really bad; no, we restore one another *with gentleness*, reminding, encouraging, and assuring one another of what the gospel says about us when we repent and turn to Christ: that you are completely forgiven, beloved, and declared perfectly righteous in Christ, purely by grace and not by works!

We need to have a church culture where this happens often and is seen as normal. Ideally, this most often happens between believers in one-on-one conversions, where the brother quickly repents, the other person gently reassures him of the grace of the gospel as his brother, and the rest of the church never needs to know about it! This means every church member needs to be in the practice of repenting, being open to gentle rebuke, and confessing sins to brothers and/or sisters in the church. Likewise, this means every church member needs to be willing to not only gently rebuke your fellow church member who's caught in sin, but also *eager to restore them* with all gentleness, eager to remind one another of the beautiful promises of the gospel! We must be eager to pounce on one another with gentle grace and kindness! When we are convinced that the person across the table from us is going to respond with the gentle grace of the gospel, then we will be more motivated to confess our sins to one another, publicly repent, and seek help and prayer in fighting sin together. Let's pursue this kind of church culture together.

And yes, I know doing this can be scary and difficult - but we desperately need Bread of Life Baptist Church to function this way. And that's because every single one of us sins, and every single one of us is going to need to be gently restored. This is why Paul follows up with a second exhortation in verse 1: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." This reminds us that *all of us* will sin - and therefore, *all of us* will need to be rebuked, called to repent, and restored. We help do this for others because *we ourselves* need others to do this for us. And this

also guards us from being haughty, prideful, and presumptuous when others sin. None of us are sinless; therefore, none of us should act self-righteous or be judgmental. When our fellow believer sins, we can seek to restore him *gently*, instead of being harsh and judgmental, because *we, too*, are just as prone to sin and temptation. We can be gentle because we, too, need others to be gentle with us. We need each other - we need help bearing one another's' burdens. Which leads to Paul's next exhortation:

III. Lovingly Bear One Another's Burdens as a Church (6:2)

We see this in verse 2: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ." Now we've just seen a specific example of bearing one another's burdens - we're called to help bear the burdens of each other's sin by helping restore each member that falls, reassuring them of the gospel, helping them to repent, keep trusting Christ, and walk by the Spirit as they resume the fight against flesh. In other words, we're called to *bear one another's spiritual burdens*. And now, Paul makes clear, this is a much broader exhortation than just dealing with our sins. This includes anything that weighs us down or makes it difficult to follow Christ.

As Christians, we're led by the Spirit to love one another and follow Christ; we fulfill the "law of Christ" by loving one another, just like Christ sacrificially loves us - even to the point of dying for us! Therefore, we are called to live the Christian life, not on our own, but *together* - in the context of the local church. And this doesn't mean just showing up to church - it means *actually being involved in the church community*, actively being part of the family. Following Christ demands that we *love one another*, as a church family, by *bearing one another's burdens*

Every single one of us has burdens - our temptations and sins; our failures and weaknesses; financial struggles that make us prone towards anxiety; emotional burdens and sorrows that tempt us to doubt; physical trials that make it harder to walk the Christian life; unbelieving friends and family members whose salvation we long for, and yet we're growing weary in praying for them. The beautiful thing about being part of a church family means you don't have to bear these burdens alone - we're called to bear all of these burdens *together!* This is an essential part of what it means to be part of the church community! The morning worship service fulfills other essential purposes - where we have corporate worship, prayer, singing, preaching, teaching, baptism, and communion. But if we *only* come on Sunday mornings, then we miss out on actually knowing and bearing the burdens of others, or letting them know and bear our own burdens! In fact, this is why we have entire church services devoted to doing this

very thing! We have Wednesday night small group discussions and our Sunday night prayer meeting to allow a format for us to *bear one another's* burdens as a church! Our prayer meeting gives us an opportunity to share what's going on in our lives, so that we can pray, weep and rejoice together! It allows you to share what your burdens and for us to know and bear them, through encouragement, prayer, and meeting needs. Our prayer nights give you an opportunity to obey this biblical command; after all, you can't bear the burdens of your fellow church members if you don't know what they are! And we can't know and bear each others' burdens unless we're regularly gathering together and making our burdens known.

Now, I know this doesn't have to only happen at a church prayer meeting or bible study - in fact, I hope it doesn't stop there! Let's bear each other's burdens throughout the week, in each other's homes, over coffee, over lunch! But let's *start* by making it a priority, for each of us, to regularly come to Sunday night prayer meetings. Come and share your burdens, so that we can bear them with you through encouragement and prayer. Come and listen to our burdens and help us bear them as well! After all, *we need each other*; we can't bear the burdens of the Christian life alone! And as we've already seen from the v.3, if we say otherwise and think we don't need the help of the church community, then we're lying to ourselves: "For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." So let us bear each other's burdens! Today we don't have a prayer meeting, but we do have a picnic - let's fellowship together and love one another! But then next Sunday night, come to the prayer meeting, and let's continue to fellowship and love one another by bearing each other's burdens! We all need it!

And we also need to do it because God commands it. After all, we're called to do this in order to "fulfill the Law of Christ." And so, Paul concludes the passage by reminding all of us of our personal responsibility and accountability before God.

IV. Examine Your Own Works, for Each Individual is Responsible Before God (6:4-5)

The last exhortation comes in vv.4-5: "But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load." Now, these verses immediately strike us as perplexing, don't they? Paul's just told us to bear each other's burdens - why, then, does he now say that each will have to bear his own load? Furthermore, the entire letter of Galatians has argued that we are justified and declared righteous through faith in Christ alone, not works! So why, then, does Paul tell us to "test" our own works, so that we have "reason to boast" in ourselves?

Here's what I think is going on: Paul is reminding us that each one of us is personally responsible for our own works. We are not saved by our works, but only by grace through faith in Christ alone! Yet our own works *are important*; they show that we're truly in Christ! So we're called to examine our own life; we're reminded that we're each called to obey God; our works don't justify us, but they are evidence of our faith in Christ.

This reminds us that every single one of us is going to have to give an account before God. This reminds us that we are *each responsible* for striving to obey God and fulfill the Law of Christ - if we're going to profess faith and claim to follow Christ, then we must actively fulfill the Law of Christ: we must be invested in a local church community, loving others by bearing their burdens and letting them bear ours; ironically, in doing so, we each "bear our own load. We can't just sit back and expect the rest of the church to do this for us. We can't just expect others' to bear our burdens without striving to bear theirs as well. Nor can we sit back passively and wait until the church proves themselves toward us before we serve others - that's not Christ-like at all! Instead, we must self-sacrificially dive in and begin bearing others' burdens, regardless of whether or not others' return the favor; we must love one another more than we love ourselves.

Paul commands us to be a church community that embodies the love of Christ and walks by the Spirit *together* by being a church community that *bears one another's burdens* - but he makes clear that the community as a whole will only look like this if *each individual Christian, each individual church member*, takes personal responsibility for plugging in, getting involved, and not only letting people know and bear their burdens, but seeking to bear the burdens of others as well.

But ultimately, as we examine our own works and remember our own personal responsibility, it points us to the final judgment of God, where we will all give an account before the Lord. And as we're all held personally accountable for our works, here's the terrifying reality: we can't boast in ourselves because we have nothing to boast of! Even our best of works fall short. YOU see, we aren't going to be compared to each other - we're going to be compared to the righteousness of God! He's the standard! If we start to become puffed up with pride and self-righteousness, and begin to think that we are "something" and have it all put together - if we begin to think that we're good enough, that we don't need help, not from the church, not even from God - then reality is going to slap us and show us: we're nothing! None of us are good enough for God; what we deserve eternal damnation in Hell. As we examine our lives and works

in the light of the gospel, it humbles us - we have nothing in ourselves to boast of! And yet, we also know that on that day of judgment, if we are trusting in Christ alone, we will be declared righteous! Paul has made it very clear that *our works do not save us!* We are not justified based on our good works or not how much or how little we sin. We're justified purely through trusting in Christ's perfect life, death on the cross for our sins, and resurrection as sufficient to save us!

So part of how we bear one another's burdens, week after week, is by preaching this gospel to each other with this reassurance: if you're trusting in Christ alone this morning, you are completely forgiven and righteous, purely because Jesus already earned your righteousness and dealt with your sins for you! In a few moments, we get to proclaim this gospel assurance to each other, visibly, through communion. If you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel preaching church this morning, we invite you to come to the table with us.

But if you're not a believer, then there's a different way to respond: simply trust Christ to bear the burden of your sins, in full! Trust that Christ lived, died on the cross, and was raised to save you, and you will be declared righteous and raised to life! Then, profess your faith in baptism as join a church family, where we get to link arms and walk this pilgrim road toward heaven together! If you have any questions about this, I would love to speak with you.

Let us have a moment of silence before we pray.