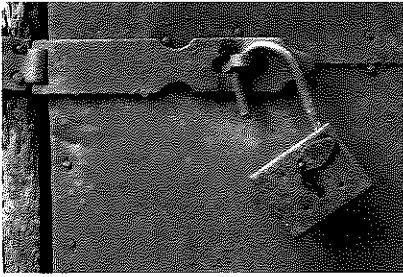


Love Makes Burdens Light



Topic

Christian love

Theme

Loving Christians lighten one another's burdens.

Desired Learner Response

As a result of this lesson, the learners will respond to the law of Christ by lovingly helping to lighten someone else's burden this week.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 14

Scripture Focus

Galatians 6:1–5

Summary

Christians fulfill the law of Christ by shouldering their own responsibility to live a godly life and by helping others to shoulder their responsibility. Fulfilling these responsibilities requires commitment, compassion, and love.

Outline

- I. Love Enough to Restore (Gal. 6:1)
- II. Love Enough to Support (Gal. 6:2)
- III. Love Enough to Work (Gal. 6:3–5)
 - A. Conduct a humble examination (6:3, 4)
 - B. Shoulder a personal responsibility (6:5)

Galatians 6:1–5

Memory Verses

"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" (Galatians 6:1, 2).

GETTING STARTED

How are you?

ASK: What do most people want to hear when they ask someone, “How are you?” (Q1)

ASK: What would you say if someone responded, “I feel miserable because I have so many problems”? (Q2)

In Galatians 6, the apostle Paul wrote about burden bearing. Each of us will be able to handle our burdens if we apply what he taught.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

James 2:8 calls the command to “love thy neighbour as thyself” the royal law. In Galatians 6:1–5 Paul showed how this law of love should function in the fellowship of believers.

I. Love Enough to Restore (Gal. 6:1)

Paul lovingly addressed the Galatians as “brethren” (Gal. 6:1). Love prompts a desire to help the hurting and to lift the fallen. Paul challenged the Galatians to love enough to restore a sinning brother (6:1).

When a believer is overtaken in a fault, the other members of the Christian family in his local church should ask: “How can we restore this sinning brother?” In Paul’s day, the Judaizers in Galatia would have advised, “Make him keep the regulations of the Jewish law.” However, the law could only point out sin; it could not take care of the problem of sin.

READ: Galatians 6:1. **ASK:** Why is meekness so important when restoring a fallen believer? (Q3) *It helps the restorer show compassion and yet be firm with fallen believers.*

Christians with the fruit of love in their lives can respond to the sinning brother in a spiritual way. Instead of responding in smug self-righteousness, weak tolerance, or carnal amusement, loving Christians can reach out to help lift the offender to renewed fellowship with them and the Lord.

ASK: Review the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22 and 23. Which fruit would be especially helpful in restoring a fallen believer? (Q4) *All of them, but especially love, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness.*

Restoration involves helping a person sort out the tangled threads of his life, filling in gaps that make him vulnerable to sin, and getting him to the point where he can be useful in God’s work. This is painstaking work, but it is necessary if the brother’s life is to be salvaged. Only love makes one willing to get involved with a sinning brother to this extent.

ASK: Was Paul's instruction to restore fallen brothers a casual suggestion or a clear command? (Q5) *Command.*

ASK: Can a person be spiritual and refuse to restore a fallen brother? Explain. (Q6) *No. A person cannot claim to be living by the Spirit while refusing to obey a clear command.*

Spiritual rehabilitation has substantial risks. When the Galatians tried to lift a brother who had fallen, they themselves could possibly slip. So, Paul cautioned them to consider carefully their own individual lives. To "consider" means to "look at all the relevant facts and come to the logical conclusion." To really help someone else, we must know our own lives well. If not, we may put ourselves in a position where we, too, will fall into sin. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Unless the Galatians exercised caution in restoring a sinning brother, they, too, could be tempted to sin. On the one hand, they might become arrogant toward the brother, thinking they were better than he. That would contradict the love the Holy Spirit produces. On the other hand, they might become careless and fall into the same sin themselves. In either case, they would be demonstrating the works of the flesh instead of the fruit of the Spirit.

Sin in the family of God requires loving restoration. It requires love that is willing to reach out meekly and gently to the erring brother. It requires love that humbly and honestly recognizes that every Christian is vulnerable to temptation.

Since every Christian has a sin nature, any of us may stumble into sin at any time. We live in a sinful world that seeks to entice us away from God's holy standard. Therefore, it should not be surprising if we sin occasionally. It is not right, but it is common. The word "fault" referred to an unplanned mistake, not a deliberate, calculated misdeed.

When a brother sins, his fellow Christians should not pounce on him in criticism, or reject him in anger, but should seek to "restore" him. Paul used a graphic word to describe this effort at restoration. It pictures fishermen taking torn or tangled nets and repairing them to a condition for useful service.

II. Love Enough to Support (Gal. 6:2)

READ: Galatians 6:2.

Christian liberty provides the freedom to choose to do what pleases God, including the bearing of one another's burdens. "Bear ye one another's burdens," Paul urged in Galatians 6:2. He did not specify what the burdens were but used general language that could be applied to many situations. The principle is clear: we must love enough to support one another.

We need to admit that we will have burdens that are too heavy for us to bear by ourselves. Problems can weigh us down. We function best in a body of believers (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12) so that we may be able to support one another by ministering to one another. As believers, we need one another to help shoulder our burdens of life.

ASK: Do you agree that Christians are usually too busy to invest time in restoring fallen brothers and sisters? If so, what does their busyness indicate? (Q7) *Busyness may indicate a self-focused life.*

ASK: Why might believers be slow to admit burdens? (Q8) *We are taught to take care of ourselves; it takes humility to admit we need help.*

ASK: How might believers learn to share their burdens? (Q9) *By having believers model it; by developing long-term close relationships that are built around God's Word.*

The Judaizers spoke of accepting the burden of the law. Paul countered by saying that if they wanted a burden, then they should bear one another's burdens. If they wanted to observe law, they should live by Christ's law of love (John 13:34). Instead of burdening people with the Jewish law, they were to help people with their burdens by applying Christ's law of love. Through that love they could help others who were burdened down with guilt, fear, pain, loneliness, or whatever the weight might have been. Only Christians can love enough to support one another.

III. Love Enough to Work (Gal. 6:3–5)

A. Conduct a humble examination (6:3, 4)

Bearing someone else's burden requires both action and attitude. Genuine Christian love works; it doesn't just talk about helping.

As Paul addressed the Galatians, he focused on changing their attitudes. Instead of simply working on external features of their lives, as the Judaizers did with their regulations, the Galatians needed to change their values and character. Paul knew such change would revolutionize their conduct. After all, people do what they do because they are what they are. Character affects conduct.

READ: Galatians 6:3.

In Galatians 6:3 Paul offered an important word of caution about pride. Pride causes a person to consider himself better than he really is. Consequently, the proud person looks down on others, because he sees them as inferior to himself. Pride often distorts a genuine strength so that it becomes a weakness. Because the person concentrates on his own ability, that ability becomes an idol that blurs his vision of God and of other people.

In reality, a Christian has no grounds for vanity. Every Christian has been saved by grace. Also, any ability or strength a Christian has is due to God's gracious working in his or her life. So instead of feeling proud or conceited, a Christian should be humble.

Pride comes when people compare themselves with others and think that they are superior.

ASK: Why do competitive attitudes among believers stifle their willingness to bear one another's burdens? (Q10) *Believers who are competitive often relish in the defeats of other Christians rather than offer to help.*

READ: Galatians 6:4.

Paul challenged the Galatians to a better way than pride (6:4). Instead of thinking how much better they were than someone else, they could evaluate their own lives based on God's standard. Comparisons are often made based on inaccurate perceptions. Paul challenged the Galatians to look intently at the genuine value of their actions in terms of how God would evaluate them.

When Christians bear one another's burdens, they must be able to say, "Do as I do," not just, "Do as I say." Real love is genuine, for it flows out of a life that is seeking to glorify God. It also is sensitive, for it has wrestled with the same challenges in life.

This type of self-examination enables a Christian to develop the necessary attitude to help someone else. On the one hand, it produces the right kind of confidence that helps one assist another. If a person feels inadequate in his own life, it will be hard for him to share someone else's burden. However, if he is strong and confident in his own Christian life, then he can help a brother or sister in need.

A Christian who compares only himself with other people deceives himself into thinking that he is something special because he appears to be better than others. But his life might be woefully inadequate when measured by God's yardstick. A Christian who evaluates his work based on God's standard can find legitimate joy in what God has produced through his life. That honest recognition of his spiritual capacity will strengthen him to take on the challenge of bearing the burdens of others.

B. Shoulder a personal responsibility (6:5)

On the one hand, Paul said, "Bear ye one another's burdens" (6:2). On the other hand, he wrote, "Every man shall bear his own burden" (6:5). How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory instructions?

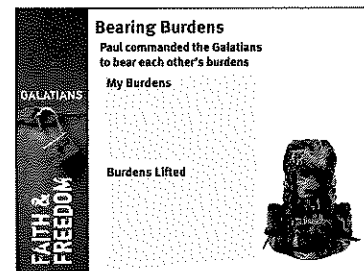
In these two verses the words for "burden" are different terms. In verse 2, "burden" refers to a heavy weight that unexpectedly crushes a brother. It is a problem that he is unable to carry by himself. Therefore, he needs other spiritual Christians to come beside him to restore and support him. However, the word used in verse 5 is different. It speaks of an individual pack, like what a soldier might carry. God has given individual responsibilities to each believer to carry, and the believer would be acting irresponsibly if he tried to shift the burden for this obligation to someone else. The burden for which each believer is responsible is Christ's call to follow Him as His disciple (Matt. 11:28–30).

So, from one perspective, all Christians are responsible for one another, but from another perspective, we are responsible for our own lives.

RESOURCE: Display resource 14. **ASK:** What are some responsibilities the Lord has entrusted to every believer? (Q11) (Record or reveal answers.) *Witnessing, edifying one another, serving, fellowshiping, worshiping, discipling.*

ASK: As we carry out our responsibilities from the Lord, what burdens can we lift from others? (Q12) (Record or reveal answers.) *Guilt, fear, pain, loneliness, anxiety.*

"To prove" means "to scrutinize," that is, to determine the real nature and quality of their work.



The two principles of bearing one another's burdens and bearing your own burden fit together. As Paul stated in 6:3 and 4, one must have his own life in order if he is to be able to help someone else. However, we cannot help one another unless we are acting responsibly before God for our own lives. Then we will be able to help a brother or sister who is burdened.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Sharing My Burdens

ASK: What burdens do you have that others might help you handle? (Q13)

ASK: Are you willing to mention those needs to caring believers? (Q14)

Lifting the Fallen

ASK: How do you react when you learn a believer is struggling with sin? (Q15)

ASK: What does your reaction say about whether you are controlled by the Spirit? (Q16)

ASK: How will you help a fellow believer handle his or her burdens this week? (Q17)

Living by Faith	
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Summary and Memory Verses

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Prepare to help bear others' burdens.

Encourage your learners to memorize Galatians 6:1 and 2. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.