

Bearing a Burden

As many of you know, I tend to follow the Revised Common Lectionary for scripture used for my sermons. The scriptures that were suggested opened up an idea that I believe God laid on me to share. It is the idea that we are to bear each other's burdens. Often, when we think about those burdens, we tend to make this a one-dimensional definition of burden. I believe that there are at least three types of burden we need to bear. It is my hope that when we finish the message this morning, that we will have a better understanding of our need to bear the burdens of others.

First, I believe that we are to bear the spiritual burdens of others. (I know that some of you were waiting for the material needs. We will get there in a few minutes.) From the suggested scripture for today, I read through 1 Corinthians the 8th chapter. If you read through that chapter, you will find that it addresses certain freedoms that a Christian has and the obligation to not allow that freedom to lead others to stumble. The chapter starts with a caution to those who may understand certain things better than other.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3 NASB)

The topic for discussion is whether it is alright to eat meat that had been a part of sacrifices to idols. More mature Christians knew that those idols were not God and therefore, the meat that had been a part of a sacred rite to another god, really meant nothing thus the meat was permissible as food. However, there were some who had not reached that level of maturity and to see other eating this meat was a problem. Paul ends the discussion with these words found in the 13th verse: **Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1Corinthians 8:13 NASB)**

The idea of abstaining from certain food rather than to offend a brother or sister in Christ started a thought process that led me to the message for today. It, opened up, for me, the idea of bearing a burden for a brother or sister. In this case, a burden that does not have any Biblical basis. It is not a burden that is part of any direct commandment of God. I began to look for other passages that suggest that I have an obligation to carry a load that is not mine.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, the 6th chapter begins with these words: **Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 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. For each one will bear his own load. (Galatians 6:2-5 NASB)**

In these few verses, Paul tells us that when we see a brother or sister struggling with an issue or veering from the path of righteousness, we are under an obligation to reach out and assist them. He certainly sets the tone that we are to help in a spirit of humility.

We are under obligation of scripture to bear the burden of our fellow Christians. Not all Christians are at the same level of maturity in their walk with Christ. Some, including us, have

certain areas where there is doubt or weakness. We need to help and build up those who are weak.

In Ephesians, we are told to offer words of encouragement and edification.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29 NASB)

Let's reflect on this for a moment. How much better would the world be if, when we see someone doing something that shows immaturity, we speak to them with words that helped them to grow rather than to criticize them and tear them down? That is our duty.

The second area in which we should bear burdens is within our family. We are well aware of the need to bear the burden as a husband. It is the duty of the husband to provide for (spiritually, emotionally, and financially) for the wife and family.

Within the Mosaic law, a brother was expected to see that a childless widow had a son to carry on in the place of the deceased brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). The burden of a parent is to rear godly children.

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6 NASB)

Children have the burden to honor and respect their parents.

Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. (Proverbs 23:22 NASB)

Children also have the burden of caring for their widowed mothers when they get old.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (1 Timothy 5:3-4 NASB)

We could, without a doubt, spend much more time looking at the duties of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children. The family unit designed by God is one of mutual dependence. Each member depends on others within the family and, at the same time, owes each member of the family certain obligations. At times, these obligations may seem to be a burden. When we live in harmony with God, we accept these burdens without complaint. These are a part of the burdens that we bear.

The third area to be considered as we look at bearing burdens is the financial burden. This is the area most of us think about when we mention burdens. It is a real need and our view of God and His provisions to us are reflected in our views toward helping others.

The ability for the church to function requires a certain amount of financial commitment. Under the Mosaic Law, God required 10% of all that was produced. Crops and live stock production could be converted to cash and given. This requirement may be found in Deuteronomy 14:22-25.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and tells us two things that God expects. First, we are to give as we have prospered.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2 NASB)

Second, we are to give cheerfully and not under compulsion.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7 NASB)

Beyond giving to support God's work, we are to give to those in need. We are to help those who are in need.

“If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks. Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore, I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’ (Deuteronomy 15:7-11 NASB)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the burden of caring for the needy is part of our sacrifice to God and it is pleasing to Him.

Through Him (Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16 NASB)

When Jesus tells us to love God and our neighbor, He tells us that all of the Law and prophets are supported in this love. John reminds us in his first letter that this love is demonstrated by how we share.

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:17-18 NASB)

The burdens we have considered this morning are not onerous. Jesus tells us that in Matthew the 11th chapter.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NASB)

When I reflect on these burdens, the burden of fellow Christians who fail to live up to my standards, the burden of family responsibilities, and the burden of helping others, I may wonder how can I bear up under these burdens. Then I remember that I am not alone. I am part of a larger group. I am part of the church. This church which comes together to share is meeting needs and in celebrating our victory in Jesus as we see in Acts the 2nd chapter.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NASB)

The beauty of sharing burdens with the beautiful people in God’s church.