

July 10th 2011 Practical Christianity #6 Burden Bearing: Gal 6:1-10—v2.

Many of us would be familiar with the song 'He ain't heavy, he's my brother.' It's a song based on a cartoon printed in a magazine back in 1941. The cartoon showed a young boy carrying another young fellow. Someone asks the boy, "isn't he heavy." The boy replied, 'he's not heavy Mister, he's my brother'. When this first appeared in print, a Catholic father who was in charge of what was known as Boys Town, an orphanage for boys in America, gained permission to use that phrase as the motto for his organization, because it reminded him of photos taken years before of a young crippled boy being carried by the other boys at the home. They saw him as their brother. The lyrics of this song become more meaningful when we know the story behind it. Particularly the following lines:

*The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows when
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

*So on we go
His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
We'll get there
For I know
He would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

*If I'm laden at all
I'm laden with sadness
That everyone's heart
Isn't filled with the gladness
Of love for one another*

The connection of the lyrics of that song with our text this morning is twofold. For the words of Galatians 6:2 are addressed according to verse 1, to brothers and sisters. They are aimed at a family. Not a natural family but

a spiritual family made up of people who consider themselves brothers and sisters in Christ. A spiritual family like we have here in this fellowship. So the first connection is that like the boys in the song we too are family. The second connection is that we also bear one another's burden as an expression of love for one another.

Galatians 6:2 says:-

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

You may have noticed that we have moved away from the book of James this morning and that is because the sentiment expressed here by Paul connects well with what James has been saying. James is all about Practical Christianity and you can't get a more practical expression of Christianity than in burden bearing. Jesus is the Supreme Burden Bearer in every way and He is our Example and Guide. So, says Paul, when we bear one another's burdens we fulfill the law or requirement of Christ, which is the law of love.

Consequently the more we become like Christ through our obedience to Him and our Knowledge of His ways, the more of a burden bearer to others we are, and the more we allow others to help us with our burdens too. As the song says:-

***Brother let me be your servant
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I might have the grace
To let you be my servant too***

This becomes one of the special things about being a part of a spiritual family. The loving of one another, caring for one another, and burden bearing with one another, binds us together as one family in Christ in a most precious way. It is an aim that we are constantly striving after, for when we become family as Christ desires us to be then we have the answer to the third verse of the, "He ain't heavy song", which proclaims:

***If I'm laden at all
I'm laden with sadness
That everyone's heart
Isn't filled with the gladness
Of love for one another***

Jesus expects His followers. His Christ-ones. To experience the gladness of love for one another especially as we bear one another's burdens.

I believe that this happens a lot within our fellowship here. Over the past several months we have seen burdens increase within our spiritual family. Burdens of health, of grief, of economic hardship, of loss. As your Pastor I find great joy in the many stories I hear of how a burden has been lifted or shared through the love and kindness of a fellow Christian or Christians.

The word bear means to lift up or carry. One writer refers to the behavior of a Stork as an example from nature of burden bearing. Evidently the mother stork will sail under her young when they first attempt to fly, and, if they begin to fall will bear them up and support them.

Something for us to think about as far as our young people or new Christians are concerned.

He went on to say that when one Stork has been wounded by the hunter, the able ones gather about it, put their wings under it, and try to carry it away. What a picture of burden bearing within a Christian community that is.

But sometimes, of course, we look at the burden someone is bearing and we feel overwhelmed by it. We want so much to help but feel unable or under-resourced to do so. At such times we must never underestimate the comfort and power of our prayers. I was talking to Helen Vintiner the other day about a question she had been looking at in our home group's Bible Study booklet. It asked who she would turn to for help when the problem just seemed too great for her to handle. And she told me that the person who came to mind was Terry Baker, because she knew that the first thing he would do would be to pray with her about the issue. Burden bearing doesn't equate to solving the problem, although that may at times happen. It means being there for someone.

There is also, in the context of this instruction in Galatians 6, a very specific type of burden bearing that we are responsible for as Christians. It relates to a fellow Christian who is struggling to overcome weakness or sin in their lives. Paul writes in Galatians 6:1

My friends, you are spiritual. So if someone is trapped in sin, you should gently lead that person back to the right path. But watch out, and don't be tempted yourself.

Our burden bearing should not just be focused on the physical and emotional. We should also be aware of those who are battling spiritually. Who are plagued by sins that draw them away from the Lord. Waging a war against an addiction of some sort or another. Constantly avoiding times of worship and fellowship. Fellow Christians who need to be loved back into the fellowship, or gently challenged about their Christian walk. The NIV says 'to gently restore', using a word that is used elsewhere to refer to mending nets, setting a broken bone back in place, or bringing warring factions together.

It is a great privilege that we have been given as Christians—to be part of the process by which the Lord restores believers back to Himself when they have fallen away or transgressed. But the warning Paul gives is that we do so with gentleness, without harsh condemnation, and avoid thinking of ourselves as better than them, or beyond the sin they have committed.

Burden bearing is such a vital part of being church together, and in my reading about this subject I came across the following illustration that I found really meaningful.

It relates to a building in the London suburb of Windsor—The Windsor Guildhall in fact—that Judy and I saw when we were there last year. It was designed by Christopher Wren in 1688 with a ground floor that was completely open to the elements so that it could be used as a public market. The top part of the building is supported by 18 pillars around the edge.

When the town councilors first saw the plans they protested to Wren that there were not enough pillars to safely support the building above. Wren argued that his design was solid and safe but eventually agreed to add four extra interior columns. However, Wren had the final say, for although the pillars were built he so designed them that they were two inches short. They in fact held no weight whatsoever and for centuries the building stood without the central pillars doing anything at all.

The person giving this illustration went on to comment that "The book of I Peter describes the church as a building...not made of stone, but of *living stones*. We, as Christians, make up the structure of the church.

But God is not like Christopher Wren; unlike Wren, God has not put any "useless" columns in His church. There are no useless or unimportant parts in God's building. We each have a part to play, a work to do, a section of the building to support. And when we choose not to do our part, the whole building suffers.

If we refuse to bear the weight given to us, the building will not collapse, but another - stronger - part of the building will have to carry the burdens we refuse to bear. In other words, our choice to not do our part in God's work is a choice to place a heavier burden on the back of another part of the church."

That's worth thinking about, isn't it. God has put us here for one another as well as for the sake of His Kingdom, and we are all to be involved in bearing one another's burdens. Even when we have our own burdens to bear, we can still be there in some way for somebody else.

As we come to the end of this service let me encourage you to give thanks for those who have recently helped you bear your particular burden, and commit yourself to thanking them in some way for doing so. But also think of someone you can move alongside and assist. Someone whose burden you can bear; depending upon God's strength and wisdom to do so. Then decide right now to pray for that person, and to let them know in the next day or so, that you will be there if they need you—a brother or sister in Christ who cares for them.

