

“Bearing Burdens”
Pastor Jacob Hanson
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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. If this is your first time here, or your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. We are thankful that you have chosen to worship with us, and we pray that you would find our church community welcoming and Christ filled. We are on our last week of a six part series looking at the book of Galatians. Over the course of August and up until now, we have been studying this letter written by the Apostle Paul to the rural people of Galatia. The main purpose of this letter is to encourage those Galatians, who were mostly Gentiles (non-Jews), into continuing to follow Christ and to not give in to false teachings. The false teachings that were becoming prevalent in these churches were focused around adherence to the entire Jewish Law. This Law, which was fulfilled by Christ’s death and resurrection, was being taught as the way to salvation... which takes the focus off of Christ. Paul, by inspiration of the Lord, wants these people to know that they are not saved by their works... but rather by Christ’s death and resurrection. To put it succinctly, we are saved by faith and not by our own works. To take that into our modern context, this means that we are not justified by the “good” things that we do. Baptism, Confirmation, tithing, being nice to our neighbors, refraining from swearing at folks in the Walmart parking lot, etc. are all good and proper for us to do... but it is not what saves. Only Jesus saves. Last week, however, we did talk about how Jesus’s saving grace/mercy does not get us off the hook for our own actions (at least in one sense). We are still called to do the good things the Lord has called us to do. Additionally, the final word from Paul in this letter to the Galatians follows this line. We are called to bear our

own burdens, as well as each other's. It is important to note that this is Paul's closing thought... that we as Christians are supposed to watch out for ourselves and others.

In our reading for this morning, Paul jumps right in and sets the tone for the final chapter. Verse one reads "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." This is a call from Paul that the Galatians are to hold each other accountable as well as themselves. This is to be done out of love. As verse two says "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." What does he mean by the law of Christ? The word for law that is used here is "NOMOS" in the Greek, it is a very common word for "law" and it is in reference to a guiding principle. An appropriate way to think about all this would be in light of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses (or debts, or sins) as we forgive those who trespass (or our debtors, or those who sin) against us. It is also accurate to think about this teaching in light of the greatest commandments that Christ gives: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, body, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." If we really are forgiving and loving our neighbors, then we are going to help them bear their burdens. We will also tell them the truth, which helps relieve them of their burdens. We can use a good teacher teaching penmanship as an example. If you ever watch a child try to write their "R's" and "P's" and "D's," you might notice that they often will put the letter down backwards. A good teacher is going to (gently) let their pupil know that they are writing down the letter backwards and make them do the exercise again. They will do this because they care for that child, even though at that moment the child may be upset. Similarly as believers we have to do the same thing... it is a part of

bearing each other's burdens, holding each other to a high standard in love. We know this is important, but we also should recognize that we have to be bearing our part too.

Verse five reads "For each one will bear his own load." Verse seven reads "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." In the midst of all of this talk about being saved by faith, about holding each other accountable, and about not giving in to false teaching, it is really good that Paul ends his letter to the Galatians with a call for them to bear their own burdens as well as to help others. It cannot be lost in the shuffle that we are each individually accountable for our actions and need to be doing our part. (Think about the parable with the speck in the one man's eye vs the log in the other.) It is a sad thing when you see people relying on others to get their own work done. If you have ever been a part of a school group project, you know how awful it is to try and "work together" when one of your classmates isn't doing their share. If each individual is striving towards the same goal, then the team does well. If one individual is working hard but the others are not, then the project fails.

Another example of how individual effort makes a team shows up in sports. If you have been watching the Twins lately, you may have noticed the disparity between them and the Brewers. As much as it pains me to admit, you see the Twins functioning both on a team level and an individual level, while the Brewers are sputtering. A great team starts with the individual, and then grows together, but they all need to be contributing. Christian Yelich, a player for the Brewers, is one of the best players in the league... but with his other teammates struggling, he can't do it himself. The Twins, on the other hand, are individually not doing as great as Christian Yelich... but each one is doing his part.

Which team has had better success? The Twins, as much as it pains me to say that. Beloved Congregation, what Paul is trying to leave the Galatians with is a call for each of them to individually do their work so that they will turn out like the Twins instead of like the Brewers. He wants them to bear their own load, to hold themselves accountable to the truths they have heard. This means that they are to stop trying to earn their salvation, but instead to strive towards the goal because they are saved. He wants them to stop focusing so much on circumcision, on dietary laws, on being Jewish in form and function, and to instead return back to a focus on Christ. If they do that, then others will come to know Jesus. If they do that then they will find that their own faith deepens. If they do that then they will be accomplishing the good things that the Lord has set for them. They will then be able to hold each other accountable if first they do that themselves. As Paul says in verse nine “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”

The rest of the letter to the Galatians ends with a terse farewell from Paul, perhaps signifying just how displeased he was with the Galatians while writing this and how close of a connection that he had with these people. He reminds them once more to love each other and to not give in to the false teachings that were plaguing them, finally ending with “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brethren, Amen.” As we close our series on the book of Galatians, you may be wondering what the practical applications of this whole book are for you. In a few words, it is by faith we are saved and not by works. We are to not be deceived into following false teachings, even if they sound good. We prove the faith that we have by how we act, we are still accountable for our actions. Finally, we are to bear our own burdens and also to help our fellow man bear theirs. These are the big lessons from this Epistle.

What you should be taking away from today's message should be that we are called to bear our own burdens as well as to help others... both inside and outside the church.

In our modern time, we see a growing animosity towards bearing our own burdens, let alone helping others. This occurs in our lives outside the church. Many people are not accountable to themselves in this day and age for their actions in even the smallest of ways. Greed, gluttony, laziness, adultery, etc. are hallmarks of the world we live in. They have always been there, but it seems as if our culture promotes this more than it ever has before. We as Christians are not to be that way, even though others will judge us. Bear your own burdens as best you can by working hard, taking only your fair share, being honest, and show the world that you follow Christ by earning your keep. 2nd Thessalonians, another Epistle written by Paul, has this simple rule: "He who does not work shall not eat." We obviously take that in regards to our daily work, as we should, but there is more to it than that. (Yes there are exceptions, but most of us fall into the rule, not the exception.) The emphasis is on doing our fair share, on providing what the Lord has called us to provide. You may be asking, "Pastor Jake, are you talking about tithing?" The answer is yes... but I am also speaking on more than that. I am also talking about volunteering in the church and in the community. I am talking about providing at home your fair share, and not relying upon others to pick up after you. (My wife could share all about how I will occasionally struggle here.) I am talking about outreach, sharing with friends and family about the faith that you have. I am talking about working towards growing your own individual faith. If the only time you encounter God is here when I preach to you, then you are in trouble because you aren't doing your part in claiming a relationship with the Lord. If the only time you tithe, or volunteer, or

talk to others about Jesus, pray, or clean your room, or tell your spouse you love them, or do any other number of things you know you should be doing is when it is forced upon you... then you are not bearing your own burden. Each of us is called to bear our own load, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it reveals Christ within us. Therefore, bear your own load, bear your own burden. If you are doing this already, know that you are a blessing. If there are areas where you need to improve, do so diligently to become that blessing.

Additionally, look out for each other Beloved Congregation. The reality is that none of us can do this alone all of the time, and we are much stronger as the people of the Lord if we work together. If you see another Christian in sin, gently talk to them about where they are at and hold them accountable in love. Pray diligently for each other, over the blessings and the concerns that your brothers and sisters in Christ have. Don't neglect to share your gifts and talents with your fellow Christians in and outside this church. You are needed. If your brother or sister in Christ stumbles, then pick them up. Help to bear others' burdens too if they need bearing. This too is what the Lord has called you to do.

So where are you specifically at this morning? Are you bearing your own burden in and out of the church, holding yourself accountable? Are you also helping your fellow Christians along in bearing their burdens with them as Paul charged the Galatians to be doing? Or are you lacking in some areas? Only you and the Lord know exactly where you are at, and only you and the Lord know what you must do. If there are things that the Lord is calling you to do today, if He is calling you to respond, then I encourage you to follow His lead bearing your burdens while still knowing it is faith that justifies and not your own actions. As

we leave behind the book of Galatians I pray that we would all be following the Lord diligently, bearing our burdens with gladness, knowing that we have been set free by Christ's blood. Praise be to the Lord, let us pray.

Closing Prayer