

Community of Restoration and Burden-Bearing

Galatians 6:1-5

Scripture

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load. (NIV)

Main Idea

Background

The word used in verse 1 for "restore" had an interesting usage in the ancient world. It was used to describe the mending of torn fishing nets and the setting of broken bones. Restoration is the act of bringing something back to its original state or purpose. That is what the gospel is all about – God restoring us to our original purpose (to reflect, glorify and enjoy Him). Our passage tells us that this restoration happens in community.

It also should be noted that many have struggled to make sense of an apparent contradiction in verses 2 and 5. Is Paul saying we should seek help in carrying our burdens or that we are individually responsible for our burdens?

Some translations may use the word "burden" (for different Greek words) in both verses. The first word (verse 2) is a word used for "a heavy weight someone is required to carry a long distance". The second word is used for the equivalent of today's backpack – something lighter meant to be carried for short time/distance. In verse 2, Paul is talking about those things in life that encumber us and weigh us down. He's calling those who are growing in their faith to be on the look out for those overburdened. At the same time he is calling for those helping with other's burdens not to compare "loads" with those they help. To guard against spiritual pride and comparison, Paul reminds us that we all are responsible before Christ for our own response to His grace. God does not deal with us by comparing us to others but according to the grace, talents, and gifts he has given us.

Focus

The focus of this study is to reflect on how your community can be a place of healing, mending and burden bearing. God, in this passage, is encouraging us who shepherd and lead his people to be on the look out for those caught and overcome by sin and those who are carrying around heavy burdens all by themselves. Our experience in community should help us all experience the freedom of Christ in the gospel.

Starters

- What has been one of your life's most challenging accomplishments? How did you manage to get through it and what did you learn from it?

Discussion

Q1: The passage says we can be "caught" (v1) in sin and need the help of others to break free. What is your response to this? Is it hard for you to admit you need spiritual help? To give spiritual help?

A1: This verse is a challenge to our individualistic spirituality. There is no such thing a purely personal and individual relationship with God. Our sin always affects others in our communities and families. And God has designed our spiritual growth to flourish only in community.

So, Paul is pointing us toward a new mindset – looking out for those caught in sin for the purpose of restoration. He is also reminding us that we might need the gentle restoration of the body when we are caught in sin.

We are often prideful and judgmental when "caught" in sin. We think we can handle whatever sin it is on our own. We think that one more time, with a little effort will be enough. Often, we react by thinking, "Who are they to approach me about my sin, look at their spiritual lives".

We often avoid restoring and confronting sin out of fear of rejection – "What will they think if I bring this harmful pattern up?" "Will our relationship survive if I broach this topic?"

What both of these have in common is a commitment to self (pride - more on pride later). We don't like to hear correction because we think we are sufficient and capable to handle life on our own. We don't like to give correction because we value safety and ease over other's spiritual health and growth.

Q2: As a group, read through the supplemental article, "Asking for Correction". What is your reaction to this article?

A2: This article is a call to do something rare and radical. We are all probably a bit uncomfortable giving others "free reign" to confront us and evaluate us. But biblical wisdom tells us of the deceitfulness of our own hearts and the deception of sin. We need the loving presence of others in those areas of our lives where few, in anyone, know us. It is extremely common in our age for people to walk into counselor's offices with deep struggles. The counselor's first question will be, "This must be really hard, whom have you shared this with?" And the answer is often "Nobody". We are not meant to walk our spiritual journeys alone.

Q3: Both the article and Paul, in verse 2, tell us that we can't fulfill the "law of Christ" apart from the messy business of bearing the burdens of others and allowing others to bear ours. How can we create an environment in this group where burdens are both shared and carried?

A3: This is the key application question in the study. If appropriate to the feel and nature of the discussion it would be helpful to direct the discussion toward the 1) barriers we face in the ministry of burden-bearing and 2) ways we can overcome those barriers.

This question may take a few re-phrases such as "In other words, what kind of atmosphere do you need in order to feel like you can share your burdens?"...

Those of you with young groups should allow for answers such as, "It takes time..., we need to know each other better...", etc. But try and direct the conversation toward deeper reflection on how the group can gradually become a place where burdens are shared and carried.

Sample of Barriers and ways to overcome:

TIME – even those of us in community group together may only see each other 5-6 times a month. Trust is built in relationships by time spent together. When we are struggling with burdens we might need extra time with one another. When we see someone struggling we might schedule extra time to be with them.

SELF-ABSORBED LIVES – We often structure our lives so that we only have time for ourselves and our immediate nuclear family. We can't even think about adding someone else's burdens to our "to-do" list. We schedule our kids' lives full so we are driving all around town. We sometimes over-work. And often we just don't want anyone else around except the TV. The gospel calls us to give ourselves in service to our spiritual families. We have to be creative in finding ways to be together and to loosen the hold our self-absorption has on us.

FEAR OF JUDGMENT – We often don't share burdens because we think others will look down on us. Often this is because of our own pride – we want to appear together and self-sufficient. But often it is because a community lacks grace and gentleness. A community group can commit to creating an atmosphere of grace and safety.

MINIMALIZING – Sometimes we don't share burdens because we've heard all the tired Christian responses to burdens – "I'll pray for you", "Just read the bible", or here's how to fix it... We want to be truly heard. When we hear these canned responses we feel like our burden was minimized. Communities groups can commit to truly listening and understanding how the one sharing experiences the burden. How can we bear a burden if we don't really know how hard it is or how it feels to bear that burden?

There are many more possible barriers/solutions...try to draw these out and simply ask, "What can we do about that?" when an obstacle is shared. The point isn't to solve all the problems tonight, but to reflect together on the things that stand in the way of us experiencing the power of burden-bearing for one another.

Q4. Paul is very concerned about spiritual pride in this passage (verses 3 and 4). How can spiritual pride creep into a community committed to restoring sinners and burden-bearing?

A4: The "anti" one another to restoration/burden-bearing is "compare yourselves to one another". There is a natural tendency because of our guilt and shame to use comparison to build our identity and confidence. This kind of comparison causes us to gravitate one of two ways. We will become prideful, thinking that we are on a different spiritual level than others. Or, we will become insecure and despairing, thinking that everyone else is so much more spiritual than us. Thus, pride can poison the type of environment where restoration can flourish.

If a group starts to commit to looking out for sin in one another, there is a temptation to start comparing ourselves to one another. We may get puffed up with pride in seeing the struggles others have, if we don't share the same struggles. On the other hand, we might get offended if someone points out a sin/shortcoming in us, thinking, "And who are they to point out my sin, their sin is much worse." Pride may also motivate us to keep up a front before others – we may want to uphold a "spiritual" reputation before others because we enjoy being seen as the "spiritual" one.

But the gospel calls us from comparison/pride to humility/love. In humility we understand the depth of our own sin and brokenness. With Paul we claim the title "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Love points us outward (pride always points us inward) to see others know the grace and the freedom of forgiveness and the power of the gospel to free us from sin.

Q5: Restoration and burden-bearing fulfill "the law of Christ" according to Paul. Let's talk about how Christ restores us and bears our burdens and the implications each has on how we do these things for one another.

- a. How does Jesus model gentleness in His restoring us to God?
- b. And how does the gospel tell us that Jesus bore our burdens?

A5: You may ask the group to turn to Matthew 11:28-30. This verse directly addresses both of our questions.

a. Jesus restored us gently

The word "gently"/"gentleness" can be easily overlooked, but it vitally important to the process of restoration. Paul mentions it earlier as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Gentleness is a mark of true gospel community (Eph. 4:2, Col. 3:12) and of leaders in the church (2 Ti. 2:25, Titus 3:2).

Jesus restored us gently by coming to us in grace, kindness and compassion. Jesus could have come in a whirlwind of judgment and anger. That would have been fitting for what our sins deserve. He

could have said, "Come to me, or you'll burn!" Instead, He came healing the sick, befriending sinners, and extending compassion. He looked on a sinful world, not with fury and wrath, but with eyes of restoration – even towards his own killers (Luke. 23:34).

Based on this, here is a follow-up question – How can we model the gentleness of Christ in restoring one another?

b. Jesus bore our burdens

The great burden we all bear is our own sin. We bear this burden in the midst of broken world. Sin burdens us with guilt and corrupts our world so that we are weighed down in various ways. Jesus, God the eternal Son, walked in our broken corrupt world experiencing life in a fallen and cursed place. More than that though, he bore the cause of it all – our sin and our guilt – upon the cross. He took the load we couldn't bear and put it on his back. Jesus bore our burdens by getting to the root of every burden we ever will have and forever removing it from us.

Isa. 53:12, "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Based on this, here is a follow-up question – How can we bear each other's burden like Christ bore ours?

Only Christ, as the perfect Son of God, can pay for our sins, but we can follow him in these ways:

By committing to enter into people's broken, messed-up lives.

By expecting to bear some type of cost, sacrifice

Prayer

(If feasible, this would be a good time to break up into separate men and women prayer groups). Share a burden that you need help carrying. Pray as a group for each other's burdens and commit to ask each other about this burden in the weeks to come. As you share and pray, someone in the group may feel God is calling them to help bear another's burdens.