

The Power to Change, Part 10

Are You Load-Bearing?

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Preamble

Hi, I am John from Willows, and thank you for joining me for today's devotion on this Thursday, the 3rd of September, 2026. A full PDF including study resources is available from our web site, willows.org.za/devotions. This is part ten of a series called 'The Power to Change', and today's instalment is called "Are You Load-Bearing?"

Introduction

This past Sunday I preached at Willows, and there was one point I mentioned that I want to go into a bit more deeply, so if you want the context, take a look at the sermons page on our web site, where you can get the video, audio, and PDF of the sermon.

The main idea of the sermon was that the goal of our *communal* lives as Christians is encapsulated in Ephesians 4:15–16 and then I looked at how Galatians 6:1–5 shows us a few important ways in which we are to achieve that goal.

Here is the goal:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him Who is the head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

— Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV)

And here is Galatians 6:1–5

Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each will have to bear his own load.

You can refer to the sermon for a quick explanation of how bearing each other's burdens and bearing your own load is not a contradiction, but today I want to look at verses 1–4, and especially how it is a two-way street.

Before we continue, however, a quick prayer.

Thank You, Lord, that Your heart is for us to live in harmony, and that You give us rich and deep instruction in Your Word about how to do that. Help us to hear what You are saying to us today through this devotion.

Amen.

Devotion

The first point of the Ephesians quote is that we are to speak the truth in love, and from the first two verses of Galatians 6 we get not only that restoration is to be done in a spirit of gentleness, but also that we are to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” We get Christ’s commandment in John 13:34–35, where He says

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

and also in John 15:12, where He says “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Repetition in The Bible is usually an indication that something is important.

These are the only two recorded places we have where Jesus was not merely using the imperative in grammar, but actually used words along the lines of “This is a command”, which is about as strong as you can get.

So we see that gentleness and love will go hand in hand here. Sometimes love can be experienced as uncomfortable (see Hebrews 12:1–17, but especially verse 11 for a very good example), but in this context there needs to be gentleness.

What I want to look into more deeply, however, is verse two: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” On the surface that seems like not too much work: help others where they struggle, and you’re set! but it’s not that simple.

When I was studying this I discovered that the Greek which is here translated as “one another’s” (from “Bear *one another’s* burdens”), is what is called a *reflexive pronoun*. One’s reaction to that grammatical insight could easily be “So what?”, but it gives the sentence an incredible meaning. You see, in Greek a reflexive pronoun means that the action it describes — which here is bearing a burden — is performed *by each on each*: it is a two-way street. The implication is not that A helps B, C helps D, ... and then eventually someone else help A. No, it is that A helps B *and that* B helps A. Also note that it’s not a case of a shared burden, such as together carrying a heavy piece of furniture, but that it’s A carrying a burden that B has, and B carrying a burden that A has.

In some cases it may be that one of the parties has very limited resources, whether these be physical, emotional, spiritual, or whatever, but that does not mean that meaningful assistance cannot be given. If all you can do is to pray for someone, then definitely pray!

Conclusion

This is just a devotion, and not a sermon, so I’m going to wrap up now. I made the point that it’s not simply a matter of helping a few people with some burdens, and then you’ve fulfilled Christ’s law. We see more when we read further. Verses 3–4 tell us this:

For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour.

That may sound a bit strange, but bear [!] with me. Self-importance — especially when actually unfounded — is a trap. Not only do others generally see right through you (and thus your witness is impacted), but you easily end up in the trap that Christ spoke of when He taught about the log in your own eye and the speck in your brother's.

The key to dealing with this is humility. If you're not humble, you will struggle to accept input from someone whose burden you are bearing, and there goes your chance to fulfil the law of Christ ... because the pronoun is reflexive!

I don't know how you can be in God's Will for your life and not be humble.

Let us pray.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for giving us Your commandment. Help us to follow it closely, so that we can be true witnesses to the transformational work You do in our lives.
Amen.*

General Bible Resources

[Most of the original language information (including Strong's concordance) is via the Bible Hub site.]

This list is alive in that I update it as I go along — I just don't update all the instances of it, so see my latest devotion has the then-current one. At some point I'll probably put it on the web somewhere and update that, but for now this is it. Also note that I don't check each link for its continued existence... .

There are some points in these resources where you (and I) may think differently. Just don't throw the baby out with the bath water — consider what is said, read widely in The Word, and pray to God that He would keep you from heresy as you continue in your study of His Word. Though I find the following resources useful in many ways, *each* has its points where at the very least I go, 'Mmm. Not so sure about that. I need to look into that more deeply.'

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A1&version=ESVUK> is a brilliant collection of Bible translations. I tend to use the ESV-UK version: a solid translation in English.

<https://biblehub.com> is an enormous collection of resources. They have commentaries, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and more. Unless otherwise specified, this is where I get the information on the original languages. They have of late been encouraging people not to use ad blockers.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/> packages of the same resources as biblehub.com, but has a completely different approach. They are also (currently) free.

<https://www.stepbible.org/> is an incredible resource if you want to look at the original language. When you use it on a PC and you hover over certain links you get more information without having to click.

<https://www.thebibleunpacked.net> is a rather unusual set of resources. At its core is a free book exploring core concepts of Christianity, but the book is available in seven editions. The smallest is just four 'pages' (each the size of a credit card) while the largest is 2,424 pages of A4 material. The two main areas are 'What to Know' and 'What to Do', which is an excellent balance. You can get an overview of the structure and topics at <https://www.thebibleunpacked.net/whats-inside>.

<https://www.preceptaustin.org/> is an enormous resource of commentaries by Dr. Bruce Hurt, a medical doctor. His work includes copious references, easing further study.

<https://soniclight.com/constable/> is the official site of the Bible commentary of theologian Dr. Thomas Constable, where that material is freely available.

<https://www.gotquestions.org> intends to provide answers to common questions about The Bible. While there is a core doctrinal point (predestination) on which I differ, there are many insightful answers.

These should be sufficient to get you going, but a word of warning: many 'fringe' sites (and some sects) go to great lengths to make their public / introductory material seem completely main-stream, so you really need to be on your guard.