

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

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A very familiar scripture is found in Galatians: “**Bear one another’s burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2). The meaning of this seems so clear; however, continue reading: “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself. But let each one prove his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another; For **each one shall bear his own burden**.” (Galatians 6:3-5). If verse 2 is so obvious, then why does verse 5 seem to completely contradict verse 2? How is it that we bear *one another’s* burdens but everyone must bear his *own* burden?

The Greek word for *bear* in both verses is *bastazo*, which means to *lift*. We are to help *lift* or carry the burdens of others so that they may be able to endure them. In doing so, Paul says we “fulfill the law of Christ”. How? By showing love toward others, as it says, “Do not be indebted to anyone for anything, unless **it is to love one another. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** ... [I]t is summed up in this saying, *even* by this *standard*: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does not do any wrong to *its* neighbor; therefore, **love is the full expression of God’s law.**” (Romans 13:8-10).

But what about the seeming contradiction? How can we bear one another’s burdens but must bear our own burden by ourselves? While the word *bear* (to *lift*) is the same in both verses, the word for *burden* is quite different. In verse 2, *burden* is the Greek word *baros*. It means a *weight* or *pressure*. It is where we get *barometer*, which is a device for measuring the pressure of gases. Most often it is used by meteorologists to measure the atmospheric pressure.

However, this is quite different from the Greek word for *burden* in verse 5. That word is *phortion* which means an *invoice*. An invoice lists the cost for goods provided or services rendered. In other words, verse 5 tells us that each of us must bear the *cost* for those burdens that come upon us. God tests us to prove our hearts, our faith, and our obedience by giving us burdens to bear in the form of “fiery trials” (1 Peter 4:12). Our “invoice” is the price we must pay in this life. Many times this comes in the form of pain, sickness, illness, grief, persecution, the loss of a job, etc. It is nontransferable to anyone else because payment must be rendered by the recipient alone. This is because the true burden of a trial can only be known by the bearer. While others can provide comfort and encouragement, no one else can pay the “invoice”.

However, there is more to it. In verse 4, we are told, “But **let each one prove his own work**, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” Again, understanding the meaning behind the Greek is important. Here, *prove* is not in the sense

of providing evidence; instead, it means *test, examine, and verify*. We are to examine ourselves when we undergo trials. We find the same word in 2 Corinthians 13:5, which says, “Examine yourselves *to see whether you are in the faith; prove [test, examine, verify] your own selves. Don’t you of your own selves know that Jesus Christ is in you? Otherwise, you are reprobates.*” In addition to “paying” the invoice, each of us must also examine the invoice to see if we are missing anything. In other words, trials are an opportunity to determine where we fall short in God’s eyes.

Galatians 6:2-5 tells us what God expects of us in this life. There is no contradiction. We are to help each other endure trials and sufferings especially with prayer and encouragement. However, the cost of our trials and sufferings can only be paid by the bearer; however, we need not bear it alone. They are also the means by which we grow spiritually as we examine ourselves.

The parable of the sheep and goats provides another view of this. “Then shall the King say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from *the foundation of the world. **For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.***’ Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed *You?* or thirsty, and gave *You* a drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and took *You* in? or naked, and clothed *You?* And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to *You?*’ And answering, the King shall say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, **inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me.**” (Matthew 25:34-40).

In this world, each of us will suffer trials to prove our hearts and minds to God. But these are also opportunities for us all to truly fulfill the law of love, one to another.