

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

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 deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 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 it? 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, "Owe no one anything except to **love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law**. ... if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the 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 examine his own work**, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." Some translations use *prove* instead of *examine*. Understanding the meaning behind the Greek is important—this is not a matter of providing evidence; instead, each person is to *test*, *examine*, and *verify* their works. We are to examine ourselves when we undergo trials. We find the same word in 2 Corinthians 13:5, which says, "**Examine** yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. **Test [examine, verify]** yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." 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. While the cost of our trials and sufferings can only be paid by the bearer, 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 the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 **for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'** 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did 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.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>
sabbathreflections@gmail.com