

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (Joh 13:34)

In my last sermon, I discussed why it is necessary and vital to our ministry to exhort to obedience, and I used as what I call my “anchor” this verse:

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:2)

Several people asked if I could explain why, when discussing obedience, I used that as an anchor. I was a little surprised by the request, not because it is so obvious but because I didn't realize so many people paid such close attention to those, so thank you for asking and I am happy today to run through how I see Paul's exhortation to the Galatians as being relevant when we discuss obedience, and digging into the verse itself.

In discussing with some of you why the reference was confusing, there were a couple of themes I'll address.

The first theme revolved around the idea that I was talking about obedience, and this verse isn't talking primarily about obedience but rather about a service rendered to others. Where I failed to make the connection is in plucking out this single verse rather than the context of the first ten in the chapter. We will look at this more fully in a bit, but for me, verses one and two are largely a summation of the ideas expressed in the first ten verses, and arguably the over-arching message of the chapter. But more on this as we dissect it later.

Second, I think I created some confusion because I was talking about our need to preach obedience, and this verse, indeed the whole first half or so of the chapter, is a series of exhortations to certain behaviors. So, the question was, how do those two mesh?

The connection to me is **that which we preach, we must also do**. We are exhorted to both preach and follow the commandments throughout Scripture. The command I refer to here is to “...fulfil the law of Christ”. There is explicit exhortation here to keep the law of Christ, which is expressed in its most concise phrasing as “...that ye also love one another” (Joh 13:34). This is a commandment with both a specific and a general application. Paul explains both applications in saying

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal 6:10)

There is ample opportunity to “do good unto all men”. Our preaching is a major attempt at doing that, seeking to help those who walk in disobedience and ignorance to see both. The benefit to men who see or hear our words of preaching is present, even

if they refuse to recognize it. Our way of life, our exhortation, all of it, is us endeavoring to “do good”. Every temporal help we give to men falls into this exhortation as well.

In specific application, we are encouraged to do good unto those **especially** “...who are of the household of faith” – that is they have made a public profession of faith and with whom we are knit together in love (Col 2:2), built up as lively stones (1 Pe 2:5), and are called in one body (Col 2:23). It might seem obvious, but given the number of times across the New Testament we are exhorted to love one another, and the specific attention Christ pays to His “new commandment”, it is important to focus on the attention we pay to doing good to like-minded souls. This is also a prioritization of our resources – if you have people of the house of faith with needs, fix those before you’re spending time at the soup kitchen.

As a small aside, I believe it is easy to get lost in our desire and determination to warn all of mankind against their doom such that we forget that the warnings we give the world are also applicable to ourselves. When done properly, rightly from the Word, without dilution, interpretation or wresting and manipulation, all of Scripture is applicable to all men, including ourselves. Therefore the preaching we do is part of doing good unto one other. That certainly isn’t all that is intended, but it certainly is part of it.

Before I dig deeper into any of these elements, though, I think it is useful to provide the context of the passage in which we find these words. Galations 6 can be divided into two chunks, if you will. The first ten and last 8 verses. I’m focused here on the first ten.

The full text reads:

*“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. **Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.** For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:1-10)*

There’s a lot in this passage, and I don’t pretend that I will open it all up for us today or that I have a full understanding of all its concepts. What I endeavor to do is encourage

a dialog amongst us on the concepts contained in this passage, and energize everyone to self-inspect how to better conform to these ideas.

The overall context

Paul is here exhorting to an overall way of life. What he describes here is a lifestyle, a conversation, a walk that takes effort and explicit behavior to pursue. It is not a destination, or an “achieving of enlightenment” kind of idea. We war against walking after our flesh, and this way of life is the embodiment of that war. There is not success or victory, for we cannot achieve permanent victory over the flesh while we are still in it. This way of life Paul exhorts demonstrates fruit regularly, and it is manifest in how you interact and help others.

Look at the first thing he draws our attention to – when someone is caught in a fault, restore them in meekness. Don’t rail against them, berate them, hold them to public ridicule and censure, etc. The driving force that should help you to approach those caught in a fault is your own faults and how you want help recovering from them. The exhortation is to restore them – that word means to set aright, like a bone that needs to be put in its proper place in order to heal – restore, not condemn.

This frames up for us much of the rest of the passage. This is an excellent encapsulation of how it looks to do unto others what we would have them do to us (Mat 7:12). No one, when they recognize they are in the throes of some fault wants to be berated and told how dumb they are, what a sinner they are, how they are worthless, etc. If they see the fault they are in, they know and will readily acknowledge all those things. We fall into these crevasses of sin because we have lost sight of the need we have of Christ and His ways. We – meaning all of the body, not just the ministers, for it is not only ministers who are Spiritual – are here exhorted to restore that soul to the proper mindset – set the bone back into joint and help it mend. If we look at these worst case situations and can behave this way, the mindset and behavior then manifests itself in other ways.

Burdens

On its face, one might think this passage contains a contradiction, and I’ve had a few smarmy sophists over the years try to make this argument at me. How can we be commanded to bear one another’s burdens (v. 2) if each must bear their own (v. 5)?

This isn’t all that clever a bit of sophistry if you think about it fully. Of course, there is the obvious point that God does not contradict Himself, but if you dutifully read the passage, you know this is clearly talking about two different things in this word translated “burden”, and a scholarly examination of the original bears that out.

In verse two, burdens is the Greek *baros*, Strong's number 922, which means heaviness, weight, or trouble. In verse 5 the word burden is *phortion*, Strong's number 5413, which refers to an invoice, as in a freight invoice. Very interesting and starkly different words in the Greek.

The first in verse two is a weight of the flesh, whether caused by sin, as a fault mentioned in verse one, or simply through the vicissitudes of life some burden falls upon us financially, physically or otherwise. The second, translated burden in verse five is the sin debt we all owe – that invoice we cannot pay and must all bear the weight of into the judgement.

It is clear to any true Christian that we cannot bear the sin burden of another person. If we cannot pay our own invoice, how then could we possibly pay that of another? This is one of the great follies that Catholicism teaches and truly burdens men with, this notion that if you “confess” a sin to a priest, they then carry it forward to God, having the authority to additionally burden you with terms of payment, or penance. No man can bear these sin burdens for another. Only the Lamb is fit for that task. Verse five speaks to the fact that there comes a time shortly now when the debt will be called due. At that time each man must account for himself.

While we cannot actually bear the sin burden, there are many ways we can help one another to bear the weight of sin bearing down upon us in this life. While words may not actually assist in the carrying of the burden, they can certainly make the burden seem less weighty.

We have words to give one another to help assuage the feelings of inadequacy and calm the dread that comes with thinking that with every breath we pierce Christ anew. We have spiritual tools in prayer and supplication that can and must be used to help our fellow pilgrims to bear these weights without ever coddling the sins that make up the burden. These helps, counsels, advice, exhortations, encouragements, etc., are all part of our Christian duty of charity. Never mistake them though for anything other than helps. Bunyan allegorizes it well with the rock tied to Christian's back. He must carry it – no one can come with a cart or a crane to help him along his way and actually reduce the burden of sin. We can though refresh one another daily – if we know each other's burdens.

This is one of the places where the train can come off the tracks a little bit. When we start to think more of ourselves than we ought, to believe we are the shining light in the darkness and we bear people's burdens just by spraying them all with our great wisdom like some sort of sprinkler system, it runs the risk of failing. If you don't know a person's burdens, it is difficult to truly assist with them, and assuming your burdens are everyone's can get tricky, up to the point of actually adding to someone's burdens and not helping them. Like anything, before you start thinking you have answers, consider the question.

While we can't literally help someone bear their sins, there are many ways we can help one another to bear the temporal burdens of this life and we are exhorted to it many different ways throughout scripture, such as here:

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” (Heb 13:3)

There are too many ways this can look to lay out completely, and I don't think analysis of the passage calls for trying to list them all. We know that there are many burdens we carry in this life. They are at the same time both common and unique to each of us in their specifics. There are resource constraints we each face from time to time that we can help one another with, whether that is a giving of time, money, materials or some other temporal thing. There are emotional burdens deriving from the weight of what we each encounter on a daily basis that we can and should try to lift from off the hearts and minds of our fellow pilgrims.

This is closely tied to the idea of our being a body. When part of our body is weakened due to injury, for example, other parts of the body work to compensate for that weakness to accomplish some physical task. I want this to be very clear to every person in my hearing – ***there is no one too small, too mean, or too new in the faith to assist with bearing a burden.*** There are burdens all around us and if we but look, we can find opportunity to do what we can to help bear them. But like the sin burdens, if you don't know the burdens a person has, you cannot reasonably assist in their carrying of them. Knowing each other's burdens requires knowing each other.

Take care not to deceive ourselves

There are many ways of deceiving ourselves into thinking we're doing some “good work” but in truth are doing things to give the appearance of good works out of a selfish and haughty spirit. That might seem like a hard statement, but it isn't meant to be, it is meant to be what I call a “blinding flash of the obvious”. I have said it many times, and will say it many more if the Lord tarries – we are subject to the same temptations as all the world, and you don't have to spend much time looking at the world to see this problem exemplified everywhere. Just look at the “photo op” charity all around us in our workplaces or schools. The only reason someone is helping another person is to get their name on a list and a photo in the company newsletter. We are subject to these vanities, even amongst ourselves.

We have to guard against that mentality especially when we think we're doing something good for someone. You can outwardly appear to be meek and helpful, when in your heart you are full of envy, malice, spite or just plain pride, thinking like the Pharisee:

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” (Luk 18:11-12)

Think about how this can look in your own heart and mind. Thoughts like these are simple to fall into

- “I’m restoring someone to God, which makes me more righteous than them.”
- “That person is too weak to bear this burden on their own, they need me.”
- “I must be more blessed than that person, look at how much help they need compared to me.”

On and on this can go. We must not think more of ourselves than our brothers, or compare ourselves to others. That is not the way of charity, and this comparative analysis of ourselves to others to make ourselves look better in our own eyes is a part of the natural depravity we must strive against. It is a means by which we lift ourselves up.

One way to limit this thinking is to remember that everything we have that is of use to another has come from God, not our own strength or wisdom, and we may simply be a vehicle for the Lord to deliver it to them. None of us is spiritual by our nature, none of us has prospered by our own hands, and none of us has wisdom by our own study. If we are given a thing that is of use to another, it is still from God, and we must remember that. It is given to us to serve that person, and perhaps for only that purpose.

When we start to think more of ourselves than we should, to forget that God has given us all things to fulfill His purposes that is when we are most in danger of falling ourselves.

Sobriety and self-inspection is key

This means that we must maintain a great sobriety about ourselves, especially as it relates to the work we do in this life. We must “prove” our own work. This might seem an odd exhortation if you think of it in the way we frequently use the word prove, since it would be at odds to be meek about the aid we give others and yet prove we’re doing that work.

It helps not to think of “proof” here but more “examine”. We are called here to constantly judge ourselves – not according to what we want things to look like, but how they compare to the standards of God. Are we honestly and genuinely operating in love toward those of the house of faith or are we trying to look holy and righteous to everyone else?

This requires a deeply critical and introspective view of our actions, both proactively and retroactively. We must look at how our own burdens are influencing our actions, how our relationship relative to the person is impacting it, how our heart is at any given time when we seek to aid someone in bearing their burden.

If we can honestly look at what we do and say it aligns to God's standards of love toward one another, then – and only then – will we have “rejoicing in ourselves”. This is not some arrogant puffing up, but it should provide us some element of joy in our lives that we have been a vessel of God to relieving the burden of another of His sheep. It would be anathema to this joy to lord over someone that we have helped them and if that enters your thinking, you can't possibly enter into that rejoicing.

This is all deeply personal and introspective. None of us can look into the heart of another human and see the real motivations and the real feelings they hold about anything. This isn't The Matrix and we're reading the code in real time. These are things of God and only things of God, and that is why it says we must prove our own work – not only should we be quiet about what we do for another person, but we are the only ones who can judge our actions in truth and arrive at the real reasons we do a thing.

God will not be mocked

God is obviously the exception to what I just said.

“I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jer 17:10)

The Lord knows and He will be the final arbiter of our works. He will not, cannot be mocked.

We use this verse a lot, and rightly so, to call to attention the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of modern religion. Look at this in its full context, however, and I think it takes on additional, weighty meaning.

We can very, very easily, fall into the trap of thinking that we are doing good, and our works are good, and even judge ourselves as righteous, when we in fact are operating selfishly and without true charity.

The inference here is that men **will** be mocked – even us mocking ourselves when we lie to ourselves about our motivations and behaviors. But God, He will not be mocked because He knows what is in our heart even when we won't be honest with ourselves, and friends, make no mistake, that is often.

I was very surprised to find that this word translated “mocked” isn’t used anywhere else in the Bible. There is a Hebrew close equivalent that is found in Job

“The righteous see it, and are glad: and the innocent laugh them to scorn.” (Job 22:19)

There are two examples that I think represent the extremes of this mocking we do of ourselves in these matters, and then by extension, God.

“Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.” (Gen 18:11-15)

Sarah laughed within herself, not openly. In this case, obviously it was known and immediately taken notice of. Not everything of God that we mock is immediately called out, but it will be reckoned. The lesson here is that we can mock even when we are surrounded by the obvious goodness of the Lord if we don’t believe it or see it for what it is. This momentary failing of Sarah’s is shown, I think, to make exactly this point. Mocking of God is possible even in His goodness, not just when we kick against the pricks of our lives. It is something we should take very seriously and soberly consider as we judge ourselves.

The other example we’ve looked at several times over the years in different contexts, and it is a much more stark one.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.” (Act 5:1-5)

And we all know the rest of the story – Sapphira comes and receives the same recompense for her actions. You might look at this and think it extreme, but can you honestly say it is not deserved? I don’t think if you look at the commandments and what these two did, you can come to any conclusion but that they deserved this and more.

Why?

They thought they could put on a show of love! They did this with great malice and intent, no doubt about it, and while we may do similar things unconsciously, they are no less a problem. We must examine ourselves because God certainly does.

The result of God not being mocked is clearly stated for us

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” (Gal 6:8)

A show in this life is not going to reap you a show of rewards in the next. What we sow, we will reap, we have it guaranteed here. We must seek not to sow to the flesh, seeking fleshly rewards of reputation and honor among men, but sow to the Spirit amongst those who seek to be spiritual. We must be genuine in all forms of charity if we seek the everlasting charity of the Father.

We mustn't give up in living this way

The road some days seems long. We've been at this a long time, no doubt. In the grand scheme of things it's like a part of a pixel on the timeline, but to our hearts, minds and bodies, it has definitely been a long haul.

But it's not over. We're still here, so the admonitions need still be adhered to as best we are able.

And in light of that reality, we have to keep our energy up in this matter. As the world grows darker, and demonstrates new levels of hatred toward one another and God while parroting a bunch of faux love-speak, it is increasingly imperative that we show the truth of love and what Christ's definition is. It is imperative that we speak to it and that we live it.

As the bride of Christ, it isn't possible that we be prepared for the wedding feast if we grow so weary in this work that we stop. It simply isn't a realistic expectation. But the encouragement to keep working at and improving in this well doing is undeniable “...for *in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*” What will we reap?

“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” (Joh 14:2)

The end result of the work is assured!!! The mansions are there, and Christ has gone to prepare the place for those who do not lose sight of this admonition! We must then take every opportunity to “do good unto all men”. This should be our drive, our

impetus, the thing that gives us momentum to endure even when it is maddening, frustrating and exhaustingly tiring to do so.

Now, there is one more point I want to make about this, specifically because someone asked me about it in this context, and I think it's important.

*“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive.**” (Act 20:35)*

Some of you will remember that I delivered a sermon back in March of 2017 where I briefly touched on this verse. That sermon was focused on living a general life of service and I tried to lay out the necessity of that mindset – living to serve. We have words of Christ here that aren't recorded for us anywhere else, but fall right into the message regarding the “new commandment” of John 13 (and other companion places).

I've provided here the full context of the verse:

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance

among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.” (Act 20:17-38)

To summarize this, Paul is effectively telling the Ephesians goodbye. He knew (and tells them) he wouldn't see them in person again, and gives them some real nuggets as his last in-person exhortation. These words are not the last they'll receive of him, as his epistle to them was written while he was incarcerated; rather these words are meant to solidify a memory of him in their mind's eye.

He leaves for them a picture of a man who was studious, diligent and hard-working not only in the building of the church, but in life. **His hands** ministered unto both his necessities and his traveling companions, including Luke, Timothy, Erastus and others. He invokes here a strong understanding of working hard and tending to your business, if I may put such a loose summarization on it. Tending to business not to enrich, but to deal with the necessities of life, and to use any abundance in service to others – *“that so laboring ye ought to support the weak”*. I'm going to say this again – you don't work hard to enrich yourself today or build a better tomorrow, you do it to tend to your necessities and those of others.

He invokes the words of Jesus to make it stick. Now, these words are not specifically recorded for us anywhere else I find in Holy Writ, but I don't think that should cause us any concern. John tells us not everything He did was recorded (Joh 21:25). This is just as much Scripture here in Acts as the so-called Gospels are, and here we have words of Christ recorded for our learning and admonition (Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:11).

Christ tells us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. God blesses us that we might have abundance to give, but – and this is the point I want to drive home here – He blesses us that we might receive, as well.

Receiving can be hard. We focus a lot of energy on the work and being, for lack of a better term, self-sufficient in many ways. We see the example Paul and others set in Scripture, especially these kinds of admonitions and remembrances, where Paul calls them to remember that he didn't take anything from them; in like manner we work hard not to take things from other's resource pools. He makes this point more than once, remember.

But there is a balance here that we all have to work toward. There is not a shame placed on receiving help. Paul makes the point here both as a temporal and spiritual element. This has always been interesting to me that he mixes the two. Look, we can't escape the temporal life we live. It's part of our occupying and patience. That's at least part of why he brings it up. We have to aspire to be more spiritual, look to grow in that regard as much as is possible every single day, but while we don't live by bread alone, we do live by it somewhat; it is a necessity.

Receiving is not an unblessed activity. Giving is the more blessed activity because it does great honor to God in recognizing the resources He has given us are not ours. They should not be hoarded as though they were ours to do with as we please, but the act of humble, meek receiving has its own blessings in it. Without a recipient, can there be a giver?

It can be hard to see receiving as blessed because our pride gets in the way and knocks our perspective out of whack. I don't mean pride in some flippant off-hand way. I worry sometimes that we can over-use pride as a bland, default diagnosis for every little thing we see wrong in a person without seeing there are variations and nuances to it and digging into those details. There's pride that comes from a place of anger and over-valuing yourself, and there's pride that can come from a place of over-thinking an affliction.

Resources come to us from different places and through various means, though all from God. If we're walking in His ways and He sees that we need a thing, who are we to question how He provides it? Recall that ravens fed Elijah by the brook Cherith, and no one here in this place can be thought of as a raven. We have resources – time, effort, words, material things – that are all sent to us for an express purpose, and many times that express purpose is “do good unto all men, especially unto them of the house of faith”.

Hopefully this has helped explain my thinking on this issue and provided something of value. We have opportunities every day to do good unto one another, we have but to seek them out. Remember, this is how we are known as followers of Christ, and no greater label can be placed upon us. Let us endeavor to be worthy of such a label now that the label may be elevated by our Lord in due season:

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” (Mat 25:21)