

Galatians 5:26-6:5

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 May 2012

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] In the epic story of Les Miserables, one of the most compelling, though unlikable, characters is that of Inspector Javert.

Having come from a background of deprivation and hardship, Javert has pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, and he has emerged from the gutter, as he would say, to live a life focused, committed to living uprightly, righteously, law-abidingly, and he holds all to the same standard as well.

And he believes, in fact, that he is on the side of God as he does this. His commitment is unyielding, and thus he is not very likable.

In the Broadway musical storytelling of this story, Javert's solo sings of the stars as a symbol of the unchangeable reality of right and wrong in the world.

Listen to these words. You know your place in the sky. You hold your course and your aim. And each in your season returns and returns and is always the same.

[1 : 37] And if you fall as Lucifer fell, you fall in flames. And so it must be. And so it is written on the doorways to paradise that those who falter and those who fail must pay the price.

Friends, I wonder this morning, for how many of you does that deep feeling resonate when you walk into this building or when you walk into a church?

My hope that it might not be to quite the same degree of ferocity that Javert carried it out with. But do you feel this way about the church?

Maybe you've come across someone who's held Javert's attitude quick to criticize, quick work to judge, to condemn. It's possible that you have been part of a wonderful church, but you have carried in your own heart into each church you have gone that sneaking suspicion that Javert is right and that we must pay a price for our failures and our sin.

And so the church becomes a dangerous place to fail, doesn't it? I wonder how many times do we show up on Sunday mornings desperate to look like we have it all together.

[3 : 23] Even in the worst of times, well, life is hard but good. Consider this. Think about your last week. Think about your worst moment.

The part you wish you could go back and tape over on the VCR of your life. The place that you could go back and do it again if you could. Here's the question for you and for me.

How freely would you share that with someone over coffee after this service this morning? How do you find church?

I just want to say, look, I'm not pointing fingers at you as if this is your problem. This is my problem. Just last week, I did this. Over next door, one of you stopped me in the hallway, asked me a question about an email that you had sent me.

I felt guilty that I didn't have it all together. A shame that I hadn't followed through. Like I had failed as a pastor to actually be on top of this part of my responsibilities.

[4 : 37] And I responded by defending myself and being short. Now, you know who you are and I've talked with you. We've worked it through. This is not an outstanding conflict.

But what I realized is that that's exactly it. Is that I'm part of the problem. Because I so feel like church is a place I can't fail.

That I have to put on this show for one another. Today, our scriptures give us some direction on how the gospel of grace, the gospel of Jesus Christ can make a difference in our church.

How the gospel can create a new dynamic, not of fear of failure, but of something much different.

So if you want to pull out the Bibles in the pews in front of you, you can turn with me to page 975.

We're going to be reading starting in chapter 5, verse 25. Again, that's page 975. And while you're turning there, let's remember where we are.

[5 : 45] This is a part of a series that we've been preaching through the book of Galatians for a while. And what happened last week, just to set up what we're going to read today. Pastor Greg laid out for us that there is in the heart of every believer, every Christian, a stubborn ongoing conflict between two different forces opposing influences in their life.

On the one hand, there is the flesh, the natural ways that we do things, our sinful nature. The way is that ultimately we exclude God and put ourselves in the center of our worship, of our relationships, of our pleasure.

And on the other hand, there is God, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all who have put their faith in Christ and who is there to bring about a transformation so that we might become more and more like Christ, demonstrating a Christ-like character.

In that worship, relationships, pleasure. And the gospel way to live, the conclusion that Paul gives us, is that the gospel way to live is to live our lives independence upon this Holy Spirit so that we might be men and women, that we might be a church the way God intends it to be.

And so having set this up then, Paul begins to give us some specific instructions. So read with me, starting in verse 25 of chapter 5. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

[7 : 24] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in 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 fulfill 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 neighbor, for each one will have to bear his own load.

Will you pray with me? God, as we look at this passage this morning, I ask that your Spirit would, Lord, open the eyes of our heart, that we might see the truth of your gospel in this passage.

And Lord, that we might not only see it, but understand it. And Lord, in understanding it, Lord, we would delight in it. Lord, fix our eyes this morning.

[8 : 44] Open our eyes, lift our eyes to you, Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So what does Paul instruct us to do? Well, the central idea in this passage is in chapter 6, verse 2. What I want you to see is that a church that did that would not be a church where it's dangerous to fail.

So let's explore that command. What does it look like? What does it mean to be a gentle burden bearer? Why is it so easy to fail to actually be a burden bearer?

And finally, how can God transform us into being true burden bearers? Firstly, then, what does it mean to be a burden bearer?

Look with me again, verse 2. It's a fairly simple, straightforward command. Bear one another's burdens. The idea here is that you'd be standing on a dock in the old days with a big wooden shipping crate, and you'd be trying with all your might to get that thing onto the boat, and you just can't do it.

[10 : 11] You cannot bear this burden alone. And you need a friend to come along and put his shoulder under that burden with you and get behind that with you. That's the picture that you see here.

And while I think that often we read this verse and we think very broadly, and I think it's appropriate at one level to read it that way, that the burdens we bear include all sorts of things, sufferings, trials, difficulties in our life, responsibilities.

I think that, in fact, the context narrows the meaning of it, its primary meaning. And so I want you to look at verse 1 with me, because I think verse 1 helps shape what Paul is thinking about in verse 2. Verse 1 says, again, if anyone is caught in transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

And I think that this is the primary application that Paul wants us to see. How do we bear one another's burdens? Well, there may be many ways, but the most important way for Paul is that we would come alongside one another when we fall into transgression.

[11 : 27] The picture there is like a fly that's flown into a spider's web that it didn't see. Or someone who has taken a misstep, crossed over a line from living in the spirit to living in the flesh.

It is when we take a step out of the kind of right living that God does want and expect from us. The moment of anger when our plan is blocked.

Greg talked about that last week. The sip of alcohol after many years of being sober. The night with your girlfriend that went just a little further than you had planned.

The conversation that just turns from care and sharing to gossip and slander. How easily we slip into transgression.

It may even be something we don't know about. The incident I told you about last week, it didn't even register on my conscience, to be honest with you.

[12:46] We got into the car to go home and my wife said, you know, you really need to call her and apologize. And I said, okay. And she said, this is what it looked like to me.

And you know what? She was right. And I'm so thankful I have a wife who does that. And she was right. And she helped me see my transgression that I couldn't see on my own.

And so the primary context of being a burden-bearing friend, brother and sister, is to come alongside someone in the moments where we have failed, where we have sinned.

And the goal, then, is to restore them gently. The image here is like a dislocated bone, an arm that's out of joint.

And the brother comes alongside and gently, oh so gently, pops it back into place. Painful for the moment, for sure. But the result is relief.

[13:52] Restoration. It works again the way it's supposed to. I want you to see as well that I think this makes sense of the context as well.

We started reading in verse 25 of chapter 5 because Paul, having laid out this dichotomy of flesh and spirit, comes to this point where it's sort of a hinge verse where he's saying, if we live by the Spirit, that is, if the Holy Spirit is the only one who's able to give us the life of Christ, then let us walk in step or keep in step with the Spirit.

And the image is like on a military parade ground. Men who are marching in line in lockstep, one after another, and the Holy Spirit is in front, keeping the cadence and keeping the step.

And the slip, the falling into transgression is when we lose our rhythm, when we fall out of line, when we step away from that pattern. And the restoring is to bring us back into line, not with perfection, not with suddenly I'm never going to sin again, but back into line with I'm going to follow the Spirit.

God is going to enable me to live a life that I can't live on my own. And that's what it means to be restored. The Spirit of God is meant to point us in pace and direction of life to live in Christ, to live because of Christ, to live for Jesus Christ.

[15:26] He sets the steps and as we walk in them, the Spirit produces in us a character that is like Christ. And so, restoring one who's made a misstep is helping them see their sin, urging them to turn back from it and get back in step with the Spirit.

What does this look like? The passage we read earlier in Luke 7 is a fascinating example of watching Jesus himself do this.

He comes alongside two sinners. One is a sinful woman who everybody knows how bad she is, who's weeping and broken because of her sin. And he gently says, woman, your sins are forgiven. And he comes alongside Simon, the Pharisee, the one who invited Jesus to his house, but who did not treat him as an honored guest at all.

And Jesus gently, but firmly, points out Simon's pride, his arrogance, the poverty of his love, and so, the poverty of his understanding of how much he needs a Savior.

[16:47] some practical points about what this might look like for us. How do we be burden bearers?

Firstly, I want you to see that humility is an essential characteristic. Humility that comes from the understanding that we too are sinners. Not only that we too are sinners who cannot stand in judgment of others, but we too are sinners who need others to help us when we fail.

And so, when we come alongside, there can be nothing but humility. Love for that other one.

Humility also expresses itself in saying, I don't know everything about this situation.

I know what I see. I know what I hear. But I'm not going to stand in the place of judge. God knows your heart. So it might look like this. Brother, the other day, I observed this.

I heard you say this. I saw you express this kind of emotion. Brother, could it be that there's sin in your heart?

[18:04] What was going on with you there? Coming alongside one is not as the judge. But as a helper to restore.

And the purpose, remember then, is not to say, uh-huh, I got you. Uh-huh. See? Yeah. You failed, didn't you? Now, we never really think like that, do we?

But deep in our hearts, it's so easy for us in our desire to do things right, to export that onto others and say, hey, you got that wrong. Hey, you've got that wrong.

And that's not a desire to restore. That ultimately is simply a desire to judge and condemn. So the purpose here is restoration.

To invite someone back to the gospel. To confess their sin. To repent of it. To fall on the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ who died for them.

[19 : 04] And then to enjoy the freedom of knowing that forgiveness. That there's no more guilt or shame need be buried because of that failure.

And this is the hope. This is the hope of response. When we come alongside of brothers that there's restoration. That that sin, though real, is gone. Because it has been addressed.

It has been confessed. It has been forgiven. And there's no more breach of relationship. There is no more outstanding questions.

And it is a beautiful thing. So Paul gives us this command in this passage. To bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

That is so live out exactly what it means to know Christ. And to exemplify him in the world. But my fear, as I have already said, is that this is not as characteristic of this church or of the church at large as we might wish.

[20 : 15] And thankfully, the Apostle Paul agrees with us. Because Paul surrounds this command which could be simply surrounded by loving exhortation, wonderful exhortations of be good and do better.

But Paul says, no, be careful. Be aware of how hard this is to do. How easy it is for us to not be like this. In fact, how easy it is for there to be another impulse in our heart that prevents us from being burden bearers.

I'm assuming that everyone here this morning would want to be a loving burden bearer for those around them. That you have come here and you're not thinking, I really like being spiteful and hateful like Javert.

I'm assuming that none of you are like that. That you want to be a burden bearer. And yet, how hard it can be. Yes?

There is another dynamic in our hearts that prevents us from it. And Paul illuminates this in the verses that surround 6, 1, and 2. So look with me at chapter 5, verse 26.

[21 : 20] Paul warns us about conceit, thinking more highly of ourselves, inflating our self-image in our own minds, often, usually, without merit or reason.

And Paul says, when we think of ourselves more highly than they ought, it leads us to, or it has two manifestations, that it's incredibly destructive.

We either end up provoking one another, which in this context, I think it means showing off that you're better than others. Saying, hey, look at me.

I've got a really nice suit. Yours is pretty, that's a TJ Maxx suit, isn't it? How often we do that, not simply with something as simple as clothes, but as much, in every way, how easy it is for us to think highly of ourselves and provoke one another in such a way to show that we are better than them.

And similarly, Paul says, the other way this manifests itself is in envy. Because if we think highly of ourselves and then someone else comes along and shows themselves to actually be more impressive than us in a certain area, how do we respond?

[22 : 45] Envy. the greed, the desire to take that guy down a notch, put him in his place, or, I wish I had that.

How can I get that? I want that. Whatever it looks like, this conceit leads to envy and provoking one another.

And this is because at the very core of it, when we become proud, it is because we think that we have made ourselves something. And then we live with the constant fear that we are, are we something enough today?

Are we something enough tomorrow? And so we fall into a competitive spirit with everyone around us. I'm sure there are certain areas of our life where we're not.

I don't care what clothes I wear. So you know what? I'm never going to compete with the best dressed in our congregation to look better than them. But I know there are areas in my life where it's

so easy for me to compare.

[23 : 51] So easy for me to compete with one another. Because, because ultimately who I am, my, my self-image, my self-worth, so easily built on how I compare to those around us.

when we live in this pride, when we live in this envy, it prevents us from actually being burden bearers.

Why? Think about it. If we're so consumed with where we stand, if we're in this mode of being competitive and comparing with those around us, what happens when we see someone else sin? What else when we see someone else fail? Well, it might look a number of different ways. It might look like a snarky, well, they finally got caught. I knew he was like that. Maybe a more gentle, oh, what a shame that he was so weak that he fell into that.

If we're honest, we might be more blunt. How could he do that? How could he fall into that? Anyone could avoid that with a little effort. Or a full-blown, self-promoting judgment.

[25 : 10] What a sinner. I would never do that. I'm sure glad it came to light so that we can clean up this crowd a bit. Do you see how those heart attitudes flow from conceit, from comparison and competition with one another?

And Paul continues this as he goes on, skipping over verses one and two. Well, in verse one at the end, he says, be careful lest you too be tempted because this conceit makes us vulnerable.

And it might be the vulnerability of falling into the same sin that you're trying to help point out with someone else because you might have noticed that the sins that we're most keen to find in those around us are the ones that we see in ourselves.

But, it might be that Paul is simply saying, be careful because the greatest temptation will be to pride. as you come along someone to help them, the greatest temptation will be to think, what a great person I am that I can help this person who's, well, maybe not quite as great, but I'm going to hopefully make them a little better, right?

How easy it is to do that. And so, in verse three, he goes on and he says, if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

[26 : 35] How easy it is to forget that but for the grace of God, we too are sinners in need of help. And so, verses four and five point to the fact that it's easy to build pride on how well we do in helping others.

We build our pride on being responsible for what happens in other people's lives rather than simply living our lives before God himself.

There's an actual expression of personal responsibility here. I have to be responsible, but responsible for what? To be a burden bearer, not to be perfect, not to compare myself with others, but simply to look at God and Christ and say, God, what would you have me do today?

And when we do that, there is no place for boasting or pride because all that we are able to do is because God has enabled us to do it. so it's hard, isn't it?

We need to ask ourselves, do we bear one another's burdens well? My guess is that most of us would say, well, some.

[28 : 12] But one of the greatest expressions, one of the questions that I've had to ask myself this week in light of this passage is do I not bear burdens because I condemn them, but do I simply stay aloof?

Do I look at someone who's struggling with sin and I just say, I'm really busy, that's not my responsibility, have we become so self-absorbed?

Have I become so self-protective? Have I become so self-oriented that I can't even see or when I see I can't even respond to those around me in need?

May the Spirit of God show us the reality of our souls. May He root out the pride, the comparison, the competition, the aloofness, the uncaringness, the darkness in us.

And as we see that, then finally, our last point, the hope is that God can transform us into burden bearers.

[29 : 32] God and that hope is a sweet one when we see how desperately we need it. Paul has told us to bear one another's burdens, but we have seen, as Paul saw, that this is a task fraught with peril.

How do we actually do this? I believe that Paul has given us this, in some ways, very specific, practical command as a focal point of the arguments that he has been building throughout this entire book.

That the book of Galatians has been talking over and over again about what God has done and how we can understand the gospel clearly, so that we might be able to be, so that God might make us burden bearers.

So let's look at that. Paul has laid out, in this book, a contrast. If you've been here, these words will probably have deep resonance, and if you're just visiting today, I hope that they will have at least enough traction that you get a sense of where this book has been.

Paul said there are two ways to live. There is a way to live over here that was promoted by false teachers in Galatia. We want to be right with God on the basis of our good works.

[30 : 54] We want to be right because we keep the law of Moses and because we circumcise ourselves the way we ought to be under the law of Moses. We want to live our lives claiming to be followers of Christ but ultimately trusting in our own hard work, in our dedication and devotion to being the best Christians we can be.

We build our identity on what we do and how well we do it. and we live in constant fear of not measuring up, of failing or destroying ourselves in the process.

We end up being in fact slaves, diligently doing duty before a God that we are fearful of, merely condemnation.

and we commit ourselves to this because although our daily experience tells us otherwise every single day, we hope that somehow by all that we do that we might make ourselves acceptable and right to God, that we might be able to be good enough.

and we cling to that because we so much want it to be something that we can do to be good enough, to meet the standard on our own.

[32 : 19] This is the message of the false teachers in Galatia. This is also the measure of Javert. It is a cold, unyielding world.

It produces a church that is the worst place to fail. It makes us incapable of mercy and grace, of gentle burden bearing, because we must judge and condemn one another to uphold the standards. And as in the story of Javert in the book, it will lead to our ruin. When we stand before a holy God, the hope that we might be good enough is in fact no hope at all, and it leads us to despair.

We face only his righteous judgment. Paul has said this is one way to go, but it is not the way of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is instead another way. there is a way where we can repent of our works, even our good works, as the basis of being acceptable to God.

[33 : 37] And we can instead look to Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ, we are able to receive from God what we cannot do on our own. This is the good news of the gospel.

Today, I urge you, if you are here, if you have lived in this hamster wheel existence of trying to do it, trying to be good enough on your own, I call you today.

There is another way. Look to Christ. Look to Christ who lived a perfect life of obedience for us. A perfect life of obedience that pleased God.

Look to Christ who died for our sins and our place to satisfy God's anger against our unrighteousness. Look to Christ who gives us, as we believe in him, his right standing before God. Look to Christ who keeps us so that we never need fear again that our sin or our failure will remove us from the acceptance of God.

[34 : 47] Look to Christ who has given us an identity, who has not only delivered us from our sin, but has given us a new life and a new identity where he calls us sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the Savior, and heirs of the kingdom of God.

Look to Christ who gives us his spirit to enable us and to make us people that we could never be on our own.

And this is why the book of Galatians crescendo peaks at chapter 5 where it says, for it is freedom that Christ has set us free. Don't turn back to a yoke of slavery.

Don't go back to relying on your own, but embrace the freedom, freedom from the law and its curse, freedom from our own self-effort, and from the insecurity of trying to be good enough, freedom from wanting desperately to be good enough, freedom to live in grace, to live by faith, to live by the spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

And this is the argument that Paul has been building. And then in chapter 5 he says, so then if we have this freedom, how do we live it out? Are we going to go back and live it in the pattern of selfish self-effort?

[36 : 14] or are we going to live by the spirit of God? Put it this way, living in a law-based, works-dependent, self-effort religious framework makes us inevitably into judgmental, proud, conceited people.

But grace-based, spirit-enabled, religion, faith in Christ makes us gracious, humble, loving, burden-bearers.

Do you see how it works? The Holy Spirit in that moment when we see a brother's sin, as we depend on the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit reminds us of that grace in Christ.

He reminds us of our unworthiness and Christ's unimaginable love and grace towards us. And in bringing forth that inability on our part, he frees us from pride, thinking that we are something.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that Christ has a power to do something that we could not so that we don't try to fix our brother, but so that we can come alongside him and restore him.

[37 : 40] The Holy Spirit gives us freedom from self-righteousness because we can take hold of a righteousness and a right standing before God that is not our own, but that is bestowed upon us in love.

And so the Holy Spirit frees us from our pride so that we can bear one another's burdens. we can come alongside a brother because Christ is so precious to us and restore them to Christ because he is so worth it.

Because we long for our brother to know the grace that is in Christ because we know that we too today or tomorrow will need a brother or sister to come alongside us and bear our burdens as well.

And when a church is like this it is not the most dangerous place to fail but the most glorious place to fail for in that failure then the gospel of Christ sings a sweet melody in our hearts.

Oh may it be so for us today. Let's pray. Lord we pray today that you by your spirit would remind us of all the great truths of the gospel that we have read and sung today.

[39 : 17] Lord that we would see how wonderful it is to be freed from the world of Javert that we might live instead in the kingdom of your son.

God I do pray that you will do your convicting works. Show us Lord where we are proud where we are conceited where we think much of ourselves.

Lord show us these things we pray that we may again take hold of the grace that is in Christ that we will lay down our effort and trust in him who bore everything for us.

We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.