

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: (Gal. 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** (verses 3-5).

Why does verse 5 seem to contradict verse 2?

The Greek word in verse 2 for *burdens* is *baros*, and means to *lift, endure, declare, sustain, or receive*. In English it means *pressure*. For example, a barometer is a pressure gauge. Verse 2 tells us we are to lift the “pressure” on others so that they may be able to endure their burdens.

Paul says this fulfills the law of Christ. How? “For **the whole law is fulfilled** in this: ‘You shall **love your neighbor** as yourself’ ” (Gal. 5:14). “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**.... [It] 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**” (Rom. 13:8-10).

But what about the seeming contradiction in verse 5? The word *bear* is the same in both verses; however, the word for *burden* is quite different. In verse 5, the Greek word is *phortion*, which means an *invoice*. An invoice is a list of goods sent or services provided, stating the sum due. In other words, verse 5 tells us that each of us must bear those things 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. The “invoice” lists those tasks and trials that God has given to us in this life. Plus, it is nontransferable; the payment due can only be paid by the recipient.

Galatians 6:2-5 tells us what God expects of us in this life. There is no contradiction in verses 2 and 5. Paul tells us to *first* help ease the weight of the burdens that come upon others; then he reminds us that each of us is responsible for patiently bearing and enduring those trials given unto us. In other words, each of us must “pay” the debt of the invoice given to us—but we need not bear it alone. We fulfill the “law of love” by helping others to pay *their* invoices in full.

Notice the “parable of the sheep and goats”: “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’ (Matt. 25:34-40).

The trials of others are opportunities to help and serve. While we all have our own “invoice” from God that we are responsible for paying, a true child of God does not leave the other undone. Truly, the law is fulfilled through love.