

***LOADS vs. BURDENS***  
**Psalm 30; Galatians 6:7-16**

Last week I indicated that we would not be in Galatians anymore, but I was wrong! This is the last week of our time in Galatians, as we look at the final chapter, Chapter 6.

I would remind you that the Galatians church is in crisis, and like any family system under stress, they have resorted to infighting and engaged in behavior based on their differences, rather than focusing on what is most important, Jesus Christ. False teachers have told the new, gullible Galatians that one comes to Jesus only by way of obedience to the laws of Moses ... that they must be circumcised! It is in this atmosphere that Paul argues for the priority of God's freedom-shaped gift of grace stating, that "we will reap whatever we sow".

In this passage Paul avoids being critical of individuals in the church, even as he offers practical instructions for life in community- life in Christian community, based not on the Law of Moses but on the spirit of Christ, the Messiah. In the midst of the crisis of the young church in Galatia, Paul encourages self-giving in faithful service, gratitude, and humility, rather than arrogance, hubris, and emphasis on differences, based solely on spiritual gifts and graces. However, we must recognize that Paul is speaking to those for whom circumcision had become the most important outward and visible sign of membership in community.

For Paul, life in community should be governed by faithful stewardship of ALL resources. Freedom in Christ brings responsibility for the welfare of others. In Christ, believers become keepers of their brothers and sisters. The authentic Christian life humbly devotes itself to the benefit of others, sharing and receiving whatever is helpful.

It is in this Christian community that we are called upon to carry the burden of our brothers and sisters, using the resources of self and of caring.

Soviet sport parachutist Yuri Belenko realized he was in trouble when he was three thousand feet above ground. His main chute had malfunctioned, and his reserve chute was "barber poling" around the main, rendering them both useless. Kicking his feet to show the spiral caused by the whipping canopies above, Belenko yelled down to fellow jumpers on the ground. His jump buddies immediately sprang into action, grabbed a packing mat, and sprinted toward the impact point. All the way down Belenko yelled and tugged at the static lines in an attempt to clear the tangled chutes. Below, his friends stretched the mat taut and waited. Belenko plummeted into the canvas at bone rushing speed, ripping the tarp from his rescuers' hands and knocking them to the ground. When the dust cleared, Belenko lay gasping for breath, complaining only of a sprained ankle and a few bruises. His jump buddies were there for Belenko at the moment he needed them most.

Perhaps you have found yourself in a place of need, needing the help of others to bear heavy burdens imposed by life upon you. And maybe you have been there for someone at the moment they needed you. In this passage from the final chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul urges the young Christians to bear the burdens of one another, to be there in the moments that their brothers and sisters most need them. That is in verse 2. However, later Paul urges that all

must carry their own loads - we will be held accountable for our own actions - but in Christian Community we care for one another and bear the burdens of others.

In the span of two verses the Apostle Paul includes the load that we must carry as individuals and burdens that are too heavy for us to shoulder alone.

Christian community must show compassion for one another, bearing the burdens to the point that if one makes it, we all will make it. In 1953 Sir Edmond Hillary and Tensing Norgay climbed the 29,035-foot peak of Mount Everest. Thousands followed, thanks to Nepal's lifting its tight restrictions on climbing the legendary mountain. By 2006, more than 2,700 people had reached the summit of the world's tallest mountain, many paying more than \$60,000 for the experience. Unfortunately, one result of this influx was the erosion of the traditional moral code of mountaineering. In the rush to the top, amateurs who had paid a fortune would do anything to get to the summit, including abandoning other climbers. In March, 2006 David Sharp became a casualty, as he reached the summit, but ran out of oxygen on the way back down. As he lay dying, forty climbers passed him by, too eager to achieve their own goals to take a chance on offering their own oxygen to someone else. David Sharp froze to death.

Paul writes, "But they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh." And Paul continues, "For neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything. It is with the new - spirit-given life of the Messiah, the old has fallen away - has died on the cross - and the new creation has been born. It is in this new, spirit-filled life that we are concerned for one another; we show compassion that will not allow us to leave others behind to freeze to death. The law has been replaced by new life in the Spirit, neither dependent on nor enslaved by rigid interpretations of the "best practices."

It is in this new life that compassion becomes a practical pastoral virtue that transcends law and invokes grace in action, joy in the spirit. Compassion respects the dignity of all human beings. In this spirit, bearing one another's burdens with grace is not burdensome slavery but freedom in Christ.

What does this mean for the Christian community...the Church in the Twenty-First Century? Perhaps this can best be seen in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, PA as they responded to the horrific slaughter of five young girls and severe wounding of five more. With brilliant clarity this community demonstrated who and whose they are as dedicated followers of Jesus Christ. They sowed radical forgiveness to the Spirit. They took seriously the work of Jesus Christ on humanity's behalf, forgiving the shooter, reaching out to his family with food that same day, and later with a share of the cash that poured in from Americans who sorrowed with them. The true gospel produces a church of miraculous unity.

"For neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them. "

My brothers and sisters, if peace is not upon you, perhaps you are getting what you have sown. If you have not experienced a new creation, then try showing compassion, bearing the burdens of others, and see the great things that God has for you.