

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Bear One Another's Burdens

by Dan Trygg

“And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Matthew 23:4

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

“For this is the *agapē*-love of God, in order that we might keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

I John 5:3

“If a person is caught in any slip-up, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. <sup>5</sup> For each one shall bear his own load.”

Galatians 6:2

“Therefore, ... let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...”

Hebrews 12:1,2

**Burdens, weights, loads, heavy-things, things-difficult-to-carry, cargo, baggage, things-that-are-oppressive-or-toilsome, hardships-that-are-exhausting, troublesome, or grievous – These are all definitions of the Greek word, *baros*, translated as “burdens” in Galatians 6:2. There is another word for a “load”, or “something carried”. It is *phortion*. This word does not have the same “oppressive” or “exhausting” connotation associated with it. It generally refers to an appropriate, manageable load. In Matthew 23:4, however, *phortion* is combined with an adjective form of *baros* to emphasize the heavy, oppressive, and exhausting nature of the legalistic teachings the Pharisees were piling on the shoulders of the people. *Phortion* is in the plural form, here. **The Pharisees weren't putting just one difficult-burden on these people; they were piling on multiple loads of obligations and duties.** They were “tying up burdensome loads” or making a *huge* load of many oppressive weights. It is like piling on packs, boxes and baggage on top of a mule higher and higher, ...until you can hardly see the mule! Only, the toilsome burdens the Pharisees were piling on were oppressively weighing down the shoulders of *people*! Jesus pointed out that **they were unwilling to lift a finger to help, either. They were taskmasters, not burden-bearers, or sympathetic helpers. They wanted to tell people what to do, not actually help them to do it.** They criticized, judged and even ridiculed from a distance. They did not want to get “dirty” by associating too closely with “sinners”.**

**By contrast, Jesus invites these people who have been beat up and weighed down by religious legalism to come to Him.** He is *not* the hard and arrogant taskmaster. He is meek and lowly in heart. Meekness means three things: **He is gentle, teachable and humble. He is willing to listen without judgment, and is lowly enough to not distance Himself from them. He has compassion, not condemnation.** Instead of pontificating and prescribing from a “safe distance”, **He is willing to literally come alongside them, wherever they are, and help them to carry their burden in a practical way.** An earlier reference in Matthew revealed that He could see they were beat up by life, and stuck. They were *alone*, without support and guidance (9:36). **They were like helpless sheep who had no shepherd. The answer? Come alongside and tend to them.** A shepherd is a serving role, not a position of power. The shepherd is there for the sheep, to protect and help them. A good shepherd will make sacrifices to care for them. He will enter the bramble bush to help the sheep get out, ...not just yell or criticize from his camp chair. He will stand up to defend the sheep, even risking life and limb for their protection. **In like manner, Jesus invites those who struggle with heavy burdens to share His double yoke, and He will help them with their load.** They will still have responsibilities, a load to carry, but the yoke of Jesus is kind or suited to them. It does not chafe or rub them raw, and because *He* is helping them, the burden becomes manageable, even light. It is important to understand that **joining oneself to Jesus means to yield to Him and walk with Him.** He said to “take My yoke upon you and learn from Me”. The word for “learn” is the same root word as “disciple”. **To “learn from Him” is an invitation to be His follower-in-training. We will find our freedom and rest as we join Him in doing His Kingdom-work.**

You see, *this is the secret of a victorious Christian life: We were never meant to live life on our own.* We cannot do it without power, support and guidance that comes from outside of ourselves. **We have a hard time with this in our culture. We have fostered this myth of “rugged individualism”.** The hero in our culture is the person who can fight through, overcome all opposition and obstacles, and stand victorious *alone*. We want to be *self-sufficient*. While that may sound noble, **usually those who are the “rugged individuals” are people who are dysfunctional. They are alone because they don't know how to have healthy relationships, or how to be a team**

player. They are standing *alone*, at the end of their struggle, because they have passed by, abandoned and neglected countless of others along the way, often even *stepping on them* to get to the top. They have done without, rejected or ignored the *help* of others, ...but they have also done without, rejected or ignored *others*, as well. **There is a fine line between self-sufficiency and selfishness or pride. Often a “self-made man” is exactly that, ...and the result does *not* look much like Jesus. God did not intend for us to be “rugged individuals” or “self-sufficient”. In fact, the entire gospel message flies in the face of such a notion.** Jesus came to save us because *we could not save ourselves*. Many of us get that part, but we miss the next step: *We cannot live the Christian life on our own, either*. If we think the gospel message was just that “God forgives us, and we get a fresh start”, we missed the point. God’s solution to the sin problem is much bigger than that. Yes, Jesus died to pay for our sins, but He did *more* than that. He put us to death with Him. Those who choose that death with Jesus, in order to be saved and to truly live for God, will find that **He offers us a new self, a new inner life, that is empowered by His Spirit. This is the double-yoke Jesus was talking about. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus will help us to live differently than we ever could on our own.** God’s righteous requirements and moral character have *not* changed. What has changed is that **God Himself offers to walk through life *with* us, to help and support us as we face the challenges of each day.** Paul talked about the character change that is the result of the Spirit’s activity in our lives. He calls it the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23). **It is not the result of our self-discipline alone. It grows out of a *partnership* with Him.** John said that **God’s *agapē*-love has been given to us to enable us to walk in His ways.** Where does this love come from? It is placed within us by the Holy Spirit, when we come to Christ (Rom. 5:5). **Because He partners with us, God’s commandments are *not* burdensome. They won’t be too difficult, as we learn to walk in His power.**

**This brings us to our next “one another responsibility” in the Body of Christ. We are to “bear one another’s burdens”.** The word for “burden” here is *baros*, the word for the oppressive, heavy, too-big-for-any-one-person-to-carry load that wears a person out. **This is a *general* statement, applicable in many areas of life.** We will choose to help one another out in life, because we value and love one another. Life is busy, and sometimes a helping hand is appreciated, and can make a big difference in making life more manageable. We don’t want to miss this most general and broad application. **We should be willing to come alongside and shoulder the practical burdens of life, as we can and as the Spirit directs us in love.**

That said, **it is important to see the *specific context* of this particular application of that general principle in Galatians 6.** “If a person is caught in a slip-up” – **This scenario is about a brother or sister in Christ who is “overtaken” or “surprised” by a “falling-aside”.** In other words, he was tripped up by some lapse of judgment or some kind of stumble. **This sin, this trap or hole he or she fell into, is the “burden” in this context. Whatever the offense may be, this person is “under the pile” and is stuck there.** It may be that they are still captivated by the sin, or they may be having difficulty extricating themselves from the circumstances they are caught up in, or they could be buried in guilt and self-recrimination. **In any case, they need *assistance*.** The Pharisees would have said, “What are you doing under that pile?”, and they would have judged and condemned the person. **Jesus would come alongside that person, through us, and offer help.** Note that the help is not a blank check to deliver someone from *all* the consequences of their sin. That may not be appropriate, healthy, or even helpful. Consequences are often important teachers. To remove them may undercut the valuable lessons that the person could otherwise learn. That may be part of why Paul advises that “those who are spiritual restore such a one”. Those who are spiritual may have better judgment regarding dealing with consequences. **The help is about restoring the person to Christ, to fellowship, and to the pursuit of God’s will in their life.** The word translated as “restore” can also mean “mend” (Matt. 4:21) or “equip” (Eph. 4:12; Heb. 13:21). Those who are “spiritual” will be led by the Spirit in how to “restore” or “mend” the person to get him back on his feet, and “equip” him to avoid this kind of situation in the future.

**We all have areas of struggle, weaknesses or vulnerability. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to “lay aside every weight and the easily-ensnaring sin”.** The word for “weight” here is yet a different Greek word, *ogkos*, meaning “weight, burden or impediment”. **The “weights” are distinguished here from “sins”, so they are not necessarily things that are wrong in themselves. They just make it difficult for us to live effectively as Christians.** They get in the way. The Christian life is likened to a race, here. **We need to strip off the habits, activities and possessions that consume our time and ability to serve Christ effectively.** Paul encouraged the Corinthians to “run in such a way that you may win” (I Cor. 9:24). **If we are serious about winning, we will strip off extra weight and entangling sins that keep us from running well.** We need to streamline our lives to be able to get the job done. **If we are hanging out with other serious-minded Christians, ones who are set on running the race well, then we will naturally talk about the things that will help us be more effective.** If running to win is our objective, we will thank those who point out our extra baggage. **If we help remove someone’s extra weights, we are also bearing (carrying away) their burdens.**