

Walking in the Spirit: Comparing, Restoring and Bearing

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[0 : 00] so that's Galatians 5 starting in verse 25 since we live by the spirit let us keep in step with the spirit let us not become conceited provoking and envying each other brothers and sisters if someone is caught in a sin you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently but watch yourselves or you may also be tempted carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ if anyone thinks they are something when they're not they deceive themselves each one should test their own actions then they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else for each one should carry their own load this is the word of the Lord thanks David good evening everybody so tonight we are going to be heading into the final section of Galatians which we've been doing for a few weeks and Paul is starting to really bring together this beautiful picture he has presented of faith over the previous five chapters where he's upheld this way of living and being in a relationship with God which is not defined on your background it's not defined in your ethnicity it's not defined in your religious behavior there's actually nothing you can bring to the equation where it makes God think oh you're better than somebody else but instead through a revolutionary relationship with Jesus we're brought into new life and a new life that brings new life not just to the individual but to the community to everybody around them and he says in chapter 3 verse 28 this kind of revolutionary statement that kind of shatters all the previous ways we divide one another in life there is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free nor is there male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus as we've been looking at in the past few weeks isn't that Jesus has just done something in the past that he now reigns and lives in the hearts of people who put their faith in him through the spirit and Paul's going to start to work out tonight as we're going to look at tonight and next week what that actually looks like what that means in practice to have the spirit of God alive and at work and in the heart of someone so I'm going to pray and then we'll jump into these packed little five verses here

Father we thank you that when we think of faith we don't look to ourselves but we look to you and from there you tell us what reality is and therefore who we are and how to live in this world and so I pray Father that you'd help us to do that tonight as we think on your word to us ask that in Jesus' name Amen I'm going to put a stopwatch on it's a new challenge I've set myself so tonight we're looking at this idea of walking in the spirit and in chapter 5 as I said Paul kind of outlines that we've been given freedom but freedom is not something to be abused it's something to live in a new direction and Paul calls life in the spirit freedom that's what he calls it and so tonight we're going to think about these there's some sermon points in your sheet if you want them these four different principles of what walking in the spirit is how that is true freedom and these ideas of comparing restoring and bearing so firstly freedom walking in the spirit so in chapter 5 verse 25 he says since we live by the spirit let us keep in step with the spirit which you think about as a pretty self-explanatory verse if you live in this thing then actually walk by it it's not this idea that you have it and it just sits there and does nothing but actually it's something to walk in it's something to be proactive in it is something that is actually a direction towards freedom and embracing more and more of what freedom looks like it's something you have to learn to be in to be in step with and the alternative is not nothing the alternative is this idea of don't return back to slavery continue to walk in your freedom use your freedom live it out

I read over lockdown the book I don't know if any of you have read the book The Underground Railroad which is like that kind of pseudo-fiction history stuff I love that kind of stuff it tells the story of Cora the slave in the southern states in Georgia and she escapes from the plantations and she uses the Underground Railroads which is this network of railways under the states to free slaves

and get them further north and it's about her journey and it's a brilliant book but one of the tragedies of the book is she heads into the different states and explores more freedom what she discovers is that racism is still there the freedom she thinks she's getting actually is a different form of slavery and it's kind of tragic as you follow her through that and sometimes the way we believe and understand freedom to exist today can actually just be another form of slavery and to walk in the spirit is not just to walk towards something good it's also to choose not to walk in the slavery of the previous ways that Paul has described the many ways we can look to do that because freedom I think I don't know how you understand and hear that word today but often it's come to mean just do what you want you're fulfilling your desires and doing whatever you want is the truest route to freedom and actually Paul is kind of saying here that's just another as we'll look at in the next verse that's another form of slavery actually to pursue walking in the spirit you want to keep being free one of the ways you continue to be free is to keep in step and walk in the spirit and to do that you need to do it intentionally it doesn't just happen by accident you need to cultivate this way of living you need to learn to do it as individuals and as a community keep in step keep going keep choosing a continual direction is part of that what he was talking about in the previous chapter of learning to prune off these old behaviours and instead embrace the fruit of the spirit peace gentleness patience love self-control and that kind of stuff is what historically we've understood freedom to be it's the freedom to self-determine it's to understand that we all have desires that we all have these base level drives and it's dangerous to deny them but actually it's also just as dangerous to give yourself over to them and let them run and rule your life and instead walk in step with the spirit and so Paul is going to go on from verse 26 all the way into chapter 20 the rest of chapter 6 to show and practice some of the two different ways of how you live this life and the first one he gives is in verse 26 and it's this idea of comparing walking in conceit if you don't get the images one was the green man of continue walking across the road that's the red man you're not supposed to cross the road when you see him but it is walking in conceit so he says in verse 26 let us not become conceited provoking and envying one another so if one way is walking in the spirit this is the opposite don't be like this and I think

James said a wee bit about this last week but the word conceited I don't know how often you would use that word but essentially it's like boastful people people who are absolutely dedicated to self glory it has this idea of somebody whose opinion of themselves is actually quite empty it's vain it's false they have an illusion or projection of who they are in the world and it doesn't match up to reality it literally means empty of glory and you're so aware of that emptiness of glory you start to chase it and try to find it in lots of different places and if you live the life like that now we all know we all have moments in life when we compare ourselves to one another that's part of the way we're wired as humans but when you're desperate to have your own glory verified and known the only way you can do that is by comparing yourself to other people it's a natural human thing to do but it's a deeply spiritual thing as well it's the craving in our hearts that only God can satisfy it's the craving every single human has to have somebody say into our lives words of affirmation words of acceptance words of forgiveness words of love and if that is not there with the words and the forgiveness of Jesus then we have to make it up from somewhere else and if you've got a shaky as we can all do at times a fragile ego maybe then what do you do other than compare yourselves and when you compare yourselves you're either going to do one of two things you're going to have a superiority complex in which case you will provoke people you'll challenge people and push them around you'll want to put people down you'll have to win an argument purely for the sake of it the argument might even not mean anything but it'll make you bolster your sense of a fragile empty kind of chasing your own glory or you have an inferiority complex you're constantly envying people seeing people as having better lives and constantly not just wanting what they've got but probably at the same time also wanting them to not have that stuff at the same time

[9 : 36] Paul's not just giving practical life advice it's like it's good not to envy people and it's good not to provoke people you'll have a peaceful life that is true but these are extensions of what it means to be people who are walking away from life in the spirit and it leads towards conceitedness that empty sense of I need glory and I need to get it from somewhere and I can only get it by measuring myself against other people Paul says don't do that walk in the spirit he'll hold these two things in tension and so he starts to show us as the passage goes on what does it mean to actually walk in the spirit and these two things walking in the spirit of walking in conceit are kind of the two options one is about freedom one is about slavery one is fully found and accepted in Jesus one is I need to find and fully accept things based on my own energy my own strength a different kind of

way of seeking to redeem yourself and so in chapter 6 he starts to go into some of the practical implications and he starts with a very simple but I think pretty profound challenge brothers and sisters if someone is caught in sin you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted so what it means instead it's supposed to be a conceited person who sees people as either like

I need to provoke them to prove I'm right or I need to envy them because I'm lesser than them I should be the kind of people who walk in this world with a mindset of restoration that mindset and it has connotations with this word of repair restore renew the very thing that Jesus is doing in every single one of us who has the spirit because the spirit is the promise of change is the spirit the promise of presence but as you see one another go through life and if you see somebody struggling somebody who's caught in sin help them seek to restore them in gentleness which is one of the part of the fruit of the spirit he talked about in chapter 5 so Paul affirms this community of people who are seeking to help one another and what he's talking about here is people who are like trapped in sin so he's not like it's important to recognize when we talk about sin he's not talking like sin and temptation are two different things this is talking about people who are like trapped in different ways or different patterns of behavior maybe it's a characteristic thing and he's like seek gently to restore them come alongside people who you see are struggling in this and with gentleness because you have the spirit too seek to help them again walk with the spirit

I don't know about you but for me some of the most significant moments in my life is when people have had the courage and the love to come alongside me and ask about areas of my life where they think they can see I'm struggling and I don't think I am and just ask with gentleness who are you pursuing are you pursuing this freedom in the spirit with the Lord or actually this thing is going to lead you continually into more and more slavery now to do that there's an implicit challenge there is you have to be honest you have to be honest in life with one another like if you have the posture which I often do I usually tell people what's wrong with my life after it's happened it's kind of like this was a struggle but it's alright I'm fine now and so I'm kind of sharing in a kind of honest way but also it's a kind of proud way I'm showing you how I've defeated it by myself this idea of like as it is in process as I am struggling with the variety of different ways the human heart can sin to let people in and to share it with one another because that's part of what we're called to do and with gentleness restore bring back in line walking in freedom of the spirit yet he has this brilliant little phrase which took me well to think about what it meant but lest yourself be tempted he's like be careful as you do this because you yourself might be tempted and the first thought is he saying that people might say things so bad that I might not want to hear it and that might be it but actually I realised it kind of clicked in my mind last summer somebody I know very well was really struggling with gambling and they always have done but during COVID it was escalating and I was sitting listening to them talking about their pain and their debt and what was going on in my mind was oh so that's how you win money oh so if I put that bet on now

I too could win that money like the human capacity to hear the struggle of another person and think oh the vainglorious bit of me that desires more money was at 100 miles an hour and I think Paul's saying look we all carry temptation and sin within us of course we do so just you know as yourself as you go to seek to gently restore people that's going on in your own heart too so be careful of that and don't let your own temptation run around and so one of the ways I kind of think you battle that is then be honest actually you know I need to be careful with this as well not that I'm gambling at the moment or anything like that just so you know but it's that place that when we're isolated and when we're hiding I think the enemy has a field day with that kind of stuff I think there's something very spirit John's gospel and the letters of John a lot of imagery of light and darkness and this idea that when we're brought into the light it's a place of healing and restoration but naturally we do not like the light and we want to hide and be in isolation the sheer act of asking people things about their lives in gentleness and in love not out of conceit to restore

I think in and of itself is engaging in a deeply spiritual way but he goes beyond just saying things about temptation temptation and how you walk through that and in verses 2 onwards he starts to talk about this idea of carrying one another's burdens verse 2 carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ bearing and walking with burdens we all carry burdens in life and that's I think one of the first places Paul starts there's an assumption here we all have them every single person and so we're going to think about just quickly three different components I think Paul draws out of what it talks about to carry oh they've all come up at the same time that's my fault here

they are here's all three of them firstly is this idea that we are made for connection we all have burdens we all have struggles we all have temptation and that might not seem the most like profound point in the world but the point Paul is you're not supposed to face them alone individualism is obviously widely celebrated in our culture

[16 : 33] I think we like to think of ourselves as self-sufficient as independent I know that's a value I was brought up with the more self-sufficient and independent you are the better kind of person you are that you're supposed to make it on your own I think sadly sometimes we believe that's what God expects of us the more faith you have means the more you're able to just deal with all your problems by yourself and not burden anybody ever and it's interesting I think I see the amount of times that Amazon recommends increasingly stoic literature to me I don't know what that says about the other things I'm buying but that kind of like I think there's a rise of popularism rise of popularism that's a different thing there's a rise of stoic literature that's becoming quite popular because we want to be able to be self-sufficient but the core of the gospel is you've got nothing to offer you're completely weak you need to bring all of who you are before me and in my in your weakness my strength is made complete and also alongside that I think we have I've definitely also struggled with this idea of all you need is God now when it comes to our salvation absolutely it's all you need of course it is but when it comes to working out the practice of what it means to be the community of God we wouldn't be called community we wouldn't be called family if we were all supposed to be lone ranger Christians or just doing our own thing and that goes right the way back to the beginning of the scriptures

Adam walked in the garden with God talking to him and walking was a Hebrew idiom for friendship in the perfection of the created order and God actually thinks in that point this isn't quite complete he needs somebody else he needs people community and in that it was Eve and that was partly marriage but it's bigger than that it's about he needs community to work out his design in relation to the rest of the world and if Jesus himself needed to ask his friends in the garden of Gethsemane to pray for him as he was carrying a burden if Jesus himself was like look pray for me my friends then you can bet we need to do that with one another as well otherwise we remain trapped and isolated we are no longer isolated individuals in the gospel but members of Christ's body and we must be humble enough to let others share ours again this needs to be cultivated it needs to be intentional and as we do this

Paul says we're fulfilling the law of Christ anyone carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ and again that's a recurring phrase it was in chapter 5 and it's partly based on Jesus' new command to love one another in John 13 and John 15 love our neighbor bear one another's burdens fulfill the law they're all kind of equivalent phrases that Paul uses in chapter 5 and in chapter 6 and it shows that as we love one another in this way as Christ loved us it might not be these like heroic spectacular demonstrations of faith but actually carrying one another's burdens is at the very heart of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself again this is an extension of stuff Paul has already said but then he brings in this warning so again he's always caveating it with walk this way but be careful if anyone thinks that they are something when they are not they deceive themselves which feels like a quite strong language is Paul essentially saying just remember you're absolutely nothing you're worthless but I don't think he is

I think he's saying something about the posture of every believer before God like why would you think if we all have burdens if we're all deeply in need that you are somehow better than other people and therefore do not need to either share your burdens or help other people it's a false way of viewing yourself again it's connected to this idea of conceit I don't think it's an exaggeration it's part of the reality of walking in the spirit is that it opens our eyes to see who we really are people who are addicted I don't know about you but people who are addicted to self glory to a posture of fundamentally opposed to the reality of walking in the spirit different from the way God has made us to be and instead if you again like if you hold that position as we all do from time to time the idea of helping other people and carrying burdens especially if it's costly is not going to be something we'll want to do unless we think it might benefit us maybe we might do it then and so Paul's challenging like look if you're not doing this because you think you're better or maybe you think you're worse and you think who can I

I'm not helpful to anyone that's still a kind of form of self-obsession he's like look to God and there you see we're all equal at the foot of the cross there's no such thing as a person who's better or worse there's more to offer all we can do when we're at the foot of the cross is look to Jesus who

then changes us and then asks us to be his arms mouth mind in this world and then he goes on again so he's already said look help restore one another with gentleness fulfill the law of Christ by building one another up but as you do so he has this phrase which at first could appear contradictory each one should test his own actions then they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else again there's that idea of comparison for each should carry their own load now I don't think Paul is saying carry one another's burdens but you don't need you know you need to carry your own burdens so he's not saying you carry other people's burdens but also at the same time carry your own that wouldn't make any sense would it because it would imply there's some sort of special group of people which he's consistently attacking the idea there is a special group of people so it wouldn't make sense so I didn't know this I'm not just excellent at Greek but he's using two different words for burden so in verse 2 he uses this word barosh

[22 : 40] I don't know if that's what you say but that's where I'm going to go for and it's this idea of a crushing weight it's a huge thing that you're not it would be impossible to carry by yourself except when you see these things worry anxiety all the different things we've got like come alongside each other and carry that but then when he talks about this other word fortune that's definitely not how you say it he then says you're supposed to carry this one yourself and that's the idea of this word it's a smaller it's like a backpack he's like you've got your own backpack you've got to kind of figure this one out yourself now he's not saying there's big problems and you've got to share those but there's little problems but it's this idea of your own personal responsibility before God that there's something about the way of what your life is that you've not get caught up with comparing other people the bit of the scriptures it makes me think of is at the end of John 21 Jesus does this beautiful restoration with his relationship with Jesus and Jesus comes alongside him and he asks him do you love me do you love me do you love me after he's denied him and he's got this amazing restoration with Christ and then

Jesus goes further and says look I'm going to tell you something about your future kind of thing we probably all want to hear like oh yeah I'd love to know what the plan is and then Peter's first question is what about John it's his first it's amazing it's like so real isn't it like yeah okay but what are you going to do with him because I kind of need to know that too and Jesus' reply to Peter is what's that to you you follow me and I think what Paul is getting at is as you seek to do life with people as you share one another's burdens remember actually though there's a plan for your life that's between you and God and if you continually compare yourselves with other people that will become your focus and instead you have you and who God has called you to be at the same time I went to see have you seen Coda the new Oscar winning film that'll become apparent why Jesus says something to Coda in a second so it's the film it won best pictures of the Oscar Coda means child of deaf adults which I found out this week and it tells the story of this family of the mother the father and the brother are all deaf and the daughter isn't and they have this fishing company and they all live and try to work this company whilst the fishing industry is going under and it's got this wonderful tension this is the way I read this film anyway where there are a family who are trying to carry one another's burdens she's got to interpret the daughter's got to interpret and communicate for the family she's the voice of the family and they've got to do their business and so they do this thing of carrying life together yet at the same time they're trying to figure out what it means to be them at the same time so the daughter's trying to figure out what it means for her to be a musician it's not really a spoiler we'll see in the trailer and I think it's worst the characters are at their worst when they're isolated and they become resentful of carrying each other's burdens because they think they're getting in the way of each other but their best they have this idea union with the people in which they live so they seek to be loving family at the same time

I think they would seek to carry one another's burdens while seeking to understand that they're not comparing themselves with one another in a negative way they've got freedom to be who they're called to be now as an extension as a Christian that's not something we just make up by ourselves it's someone we look to this is where we'll end Jesus says in Matthew 11 come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light rest for your souls is what is the absolute antidote to conceit and it can only come from one place in the fullest sin essentially looks at the world and says what can I get out of it how can I make people sacrifice for me

Jesus is the opposite he says I sacrifice for you to give you rest but not to do nothing but to take my yoke I wonder if you can challenge me on this some Bible scholars later this idea of taking Jesus yoke and walking in the spirit are probably similar ideas it's like take a yoke and walk and learn and be with Jesus and we do that because the spirit is in us because of his death and resurrection into new life and it's a costly way of living like if you think about helping the poor it'll cost you it'll involve sacrifice if you think about listening to somebody it'll involve your time and attention honesty itself involves risk you cannot bear burdens unless you're willing to be burdened yourself but we cannot do that unless we know we have a bigger burden carrier than anything we can carry ourselves this Jesus who says come bring all your burdens to me so this isn't just give your burdens to one another and hope for the best this is a Christ who says give your burdens to me I'll give you rest and as you do that walk in freedom and live like this with one another and this is part of what it means to be people who walk in the spirit and true freedom is knowing you can choose you can always choose freedom you can always choose to go somewhere else Jesus says come and take my yoke for it is easy for each one should carry their own load knowing that our ultimate load is being carried by Jesus he doesn't just abandon us and leave us to carry and figure out life he says I walk with you I'm going to pray Father we thank you that when we think about burdens and pain and all the different things and sin we thank you we're not just left to our own devices we thank you that the community of [29 : 04] God the church is part of the answer to that transformed people who in our own weakness are seeking to help and love and come alongside one another but we do not do that in our own strength we do it with the invitation from you to constantly come to you and from there you give us rest for our souls you say something new to our heart that produces a lot of sin where we instead look to conceit to boastfulness to vain glory would you help us to be people who choose to walk in the freedom of the spirit that's that in Jesus name amen amen