

Bearing Burdens

As most everyone knows, burdens are a necessary part of life under the sun. Some of them, each individual must bear; others, he may share. Of the former Paul says, “each man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5). This burden (Cr. phortion) is merely something to be carried, without reference to its weight. Some have likened it unto a pack such as a soldier might bear. In fact, one version renders this phrase: “For every one must shoulder his own pack.” This “pack” belongs exclusively to the individual; it has no handles for helping hands. My burden is non-transferable. It cannot be pushed off on another person, neither can it be delegated to some organization or institution— including the Lord’s church. Even when the church is doing its work at its best, it in no way lightens this burden which God says each man is to bear.

Accordingly, then, the obligations concerning personal evangelism, growing in the faith, exemplary living, conquering temptations, faithfulness, and other such things are “packs” to be borne by every single Christian. The responsibilities of discipleship, though properly referred to as burdens, are not burdensome. In extending the great invitation, Christ says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). Serving the Lord should be no more oppressive to the Christian than providing for his family would be to a father. Love makes such burdens light. Jesus said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15) and John tells us that his commandments are not grievous (1 Jn. 5:3) — not to those who love Him. No burden is so light but that it becomes heavy and oppressive when borne reluctantly and without love. Recall the tender scene depicting a small boy toting another little boy on his back and saying, “He ain’t heavy— he’s my brother!”? Wouldn’t the cause of Christ prosper if every Christian would shoulder his own pack with a similar attitude!

On the other hand, there are burdens that may be shared with others. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). This burden (Cr. baros) is that which is heavy and can be burdensome. Generally speaking, this is any burden that may be properly relieved or lightened by the help of others— a burden with handles. Opportunities to help with such burdens are limitless. Weak Christians, for instance, have burdens such as ignorance and inexperience. Certain sins may be difficult for them to overcome. They need help! They need sincere encouragement! “Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak...” (Rom. 15:1). Young people have burdens too. Helping bear their burdens may help some of us to quit being their burden. Jesus said, “ye have the poor always with you” — the rich in faith cannot ignore their burdens. Neither can we shun the sharable burdens of the infirm, the aged, the lonely, and the sorrowed. Concerned hearts cannot have idle hands— the law of Christ will not allow it.

Finally, in the Lord all men have a caring and unseen helper with which to share their burdens (1 Pet. 5:7). His invitation still stands: “Come unto me...”