

Sermon Draft

Text: Galatians 6:1–10, 14–18

Sermon: “Work or Pleasure?”

The *Epistle* for this week, and the text for our sermon meditation, is the last of six consecutive Readings through the Book of Galatians. Luther deeply appreciated this letter of St. Paul, for it has brilliantly made the argument that reverting to any system of salvation by works means falling from grace and that Christ has become worthless. Now in this final chapter of the book, Paul reaches the logical conclusion: having had our burden of slavery under the Law removed, we carry one another's burdens and **“so fulfill the law of Christ”** (Gal 6:2). It is simply what Christians do. **“For all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them”** (1:16). Indeed, one can only walk this way because God's peace is upon us.

The Service is over. The organist is busy putting away music. The altar guild is attending to the Communion ware. The ushers begin to close up the church. Part of those responsibilities is going through all the pews, picking up discarded bulletins, straightening hymnals, and the like.

Suddenly, the sound of young voices fills the nave. Little heads are bouncing up and down as they race between the pews. Their goal is to collect as many bulletins as possible and present them as a prize to their father, an usher. They do this for the joy of it. It is not work. It is not a burden. They do this knowing they'll receive an approving smile from their father. It's a golden opportunity to show their love to the one they call "Dad." The smiling faces and the arms extended upward with hands full of used bulletins tell the story. There's no secret here as to why they did the thing they did.

What about us? Why do we do the things we do? Do we do the things we do because we feel some sort of burden, or do we do them out of joy for someone?

Our text describes one of the things we do as Christians: we are commanded to bear one another's burdens (vs 1–2). As members of the Body of Christ we all have burdens. We all fall into sin, struggling with our own sinful selves and each other sometimes. That struggle can be a huge burden, a burden of guilt and doubt. We as Christians also struggle with each other's burdens. We each need the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to encourage and support each other through times of trouble, illness and loss. We need one another in both good times and bad.

And sometimes we need to hear words of reconciliation and forgiveness. Our text tells us we are to restore fellow believers in "a spirit of gentleness." So we come alongside of each other in times of suffering. We support, encourage and come alongside one another because as Christians it's what we do.

But why, don't we have enough of our own struggles to deal with? Do we bear one another's burdens because we think we have to in order to be a good Christian, in order to get something back? Is it a Law thing? Sometimes we help others because it makes us feel good about ourselves. If we are focused on someone else's burdens then we don't think about or face our own (temptations, family trials, health issues) like they do.

The problem is, if the reason we bear each other's burdens because we feel we have too then we are doing it for the wrong reason.

And when do it for the wrong reason our text gives us a stern warning: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" and "For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load."

We still agree that bearing one another's burdens is the Christian thing to do. We all know it's what we should do. When we're living out our Christian life, it's just what we do. But we want to do it for the right reason. What is the right reason?

Do we do the things we do for someone? We know we should do what we do for someone else, don't we? We should bear another's burdens not for our benefit but for that of the other person.

We are to forgive our neighbor because we wish her to be released from guilt. We are to listen, to comfort, to counsel because we want him to live in joy and peace of mind. That is, our works for others are not to lead us to sinful pride but to humble service. Or as Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians: ***“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”*** (Ephesians 4:2)

But the fact is the only way we can do what we do for someone else is because of Someone Else. The things we do as Christians we do out of love and thankfulness for what Christ has done to and for us, not a burden at all but a joyful response. By nature, we care only about ourselves, account-ing for ourselves, keeping the Law. Thinking we’re really something.

Feeling pretty proud of the way we bear our own load, pull our own weight, don't need anybody else's help. Earning a reward—or avoiding punishment—by fulfilling what we think must be that “law of Christ.”

But that Someone Else, Jesus Christ, has freed us from thinking about ourselves (v 14a). That really has been Paul's point all the way through Galatians, and now it reaches its climax. We are by nature slaves to sin and the Law, and trying to keep it, to beat our sin by whatever good things we try to do—even caring for our fellow believers—is hopeless.

But Christ has fulfilled the Law for us so that now we don't have to worry—or even think—about ourselves. We focus on the cross of Christ. The cross was considered a place of defeat but Jesus turned the cross into a place of victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

We do what we do for someone else (our fellow believers) because Someone Else (Jesus Christ) has done what he did for us. In Christ, we are a new creation (vs 14–16). The old Adam is drowned in our Baptism, and a new man arises; ***“he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Titus 3:5)

As a new creation, we are renewed, redeemed, restored (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:27). We are led by the Spirit; the world has been crucified to us. (v 14) We embrace the things of Christ—live a Spirit-led life of loving, bearing burdens, as Jesus has loved us.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people we know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35)

We cannot depend on ourselves to do good for others. Our sinful nature leads us into temptation, and sin will rule the day. But we do what we do because of Someone, because of what Christ has done for us in love. In love and empowered by the Spirit, we are crucified to the world and made alive to Christ. In a spirit of gentleness, we restore our brothers and sisters in Christ, bearing their burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ.

Amen