

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart March 2022

Bear One Another's Burdens

by James L. Harvey III



Galatians is famous for Paul's explanation and clarification of the gospel for those who had been confused by false teachers. This gospel is the preeminent display of God's love (see Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10), so it is not surprising that after clarifying the gospel, Paul clarifies love itself. Those who know that Christ loved them by bearing the burden of their sin also know that to love is to bear the burdens of their brothers and sisters in the church. To love one another like this is to "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). This means that love has new meaning for Christians.

LOVE IS NOT A FEELING

We easily misunderstand love. We feel bad for someone, and we think

we have loved them. We feel sympathy and misconstrue it as love. We want to help, but don't, but then soothe ourselves by saying, "At least I cared." None of this qualifies as love in the biblical sense. Love is defined by covenant and action. Emotion may accompany love, but mere emotion is not sufficient. In fact, true love persists when emotions fail. To serve one another "through love" (Gal. 5:13) and to "fulfill the law of Christ" (see John 13:34; 15:12) is to lift a burden from them.

What does it look like to bear one another's burdens, to love "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18)? When you wonder if someone could use a ride home from church, you offer to take them. When you wonder how someone is doing, you call them. When you think of what a financial burden that car repair must have been for your neighbor and you can help do a little bit to ease the pain, you write them a check. When you wonder if someone else will help, you remind yourself that

you are that someone. You help. Possible scenarios that call us to bear another's burdens are endless. The point is that love isn't content with feelings; it presses through to action.

LOVE MARKS THE CHURCH

The local church is preeminently a place of love. Paul gives the church family a special priority: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Just as we easily misunderstand love, we can easily misunderstand fellowship. Fellowship is not based on preferences but on the bond of the Spirit. Our default mode is to care for those like us and to inquire after the needs of those whose company we most enjoy. But the Spirit compels us to bear the burdens of others in the church simply because they are one with us in Christ. We love others in the church as Jesus has loved us (John 13:34); we bear the burdens of their

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The internet can be exhausting. And that's on the good days. The pull of our screens—and the interactions they mediate—is often more spiritually taxing than we realize or care to admit. I have yet to hear someone return from a digital fast and say, "Wow, that was terrible." Usually it's more like, "Wow, I feel human again."

Scripture calls us to "honor everyone" (1 Peter 2:17). Obeying that command has never been easy, but has it ever been harder than in our social media age? Thankfully, Scripture gives us guidance. Here are four ways to be a faithful Christian online.

Take (Typed) Words Seriously

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What does it look like to bear one another's burdens, to love "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18)? When you wonder if someone could use a ride home from church, you offer to take them. When you wonder how someone is doing, you call them. When you think of what a financial burden that car repair must have been for your neighbor and you can help do a little bit to ease the pain, you write them a check. When you wonder if someone else will help, you remind yourself that

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As a pastor of a loving congregation, I have been the recipient of a lot of burden-bearing love over the years. As I write this piece, I am with my son Jacob at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

This stay is not his first, and it will not be his last. I have every confidence that he is being lifted up in prayer, that meals are ready to be made at a moment's notice, and that transportation help for the rest of the family is available. This burden-bearing love has meant that these medical trials have become occasions of deeper fellowship between our family and the church.

And we are not the only ones. I have seen our members alleviate financial burdens through its deacons' fund, help families through acute seasons of financial or emotional stress, renovate living spaces for the sick or disabled, pick people up for church, and perform countless other deeds of love. This is burden-bearing love, and it is happening all over the world in local congregations. So if you have burdens, make them known, and if you know of another's burdens, bear

them in love. For if we love one another, the world will know that we are His disciples.

(Taken from Tabletalk, March 2016)

Bearing up in prayer

To bear one another's burdens is not only a Christian's responsibility; it's an honor. Such an honor must neither be taken lightly nor dismissed prematurely. There is a temptation to help tangibly which is vitally important **OR** to say a pray and then feel as though we have met our obligation. Both the tangible and the spiritual bearing of our fellow believer's burdens are necessary and we should meet those burdens as God has given us the ability to do so.

Consider prayer as a means in bearing the sufferings of others; not just saying a prayer but really bearing them up in prayer. One must really be burdened with the trouble at hand and the potential outcomes, recognizing that God alone can turn the tide and make all things right; then pray in that brokenness.

weakness, their sin, and their uncleanness. We see these burdens of our brothers and sisters not as impositions upon our life but as opportunities for our love.

LOVE IS A WITNESS TO THE WORLD

To bear one another's burdens is to "fulfill the law of Christ." This law of Christ is (most likely) Jesus' command "to love one another" (John 13:34). Fulfilling this law is a witness: the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples as we keep it (v. 35). First John 4:12 reads, "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." God intends this broken and fragmented world to see the burden-bearing love of His children for one another. The world need look no further than the church family to see an example of the love of God in Christ.



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