

Sunday 9th June 2013 Christ Church 6:30pm

A healthy church – Bearing one another's burdens – Galatians 6:1-10

Wednesday this week will be a slightly anxious time. Yes – that time of year has come round again, and I'll be taking the car in for its MOT. Not that I think there is anything wrong with it – it is still only 4 years old, and I've not noticed any problems. But until someone who knows what they are doing looks at it – I'm never really sure.

But I do know that if the car is to continue to perform at its best, it needs that sort of examination, and maybe a few things will need to be done.

And in a sense our Sunday evening series 'A healthy church' is trying to do that for Christ Church. Not that we are bringing an expert in to give us an examination – but that we are taking some time to look at what the Bible says about being church, and then hopefully applying that to ourselves.

We started 2 weeks ago with the fundamental thing – church exists to make disciples. Jesus last words to his disciples in Matthew's gospel were: *go and make disciples of all nations*. No matter what else is or isn't happening at Christ Church, we should be seeing disciples grow. If we aren't – I'm afraid we've failed the MOT at the first hurdle.

And for disciples to be growing, 2 things are necessary. First, individual Christians need to want to grow – God won't build us up as disciples against our will. If you've actually got no hunger to grow as a disciple, you won't.

But alongside that collectively as church we have to be doing things which will feed that hunger, and resource that growth. So – last week we saw that we should be a people who declare God's praise, because when we do that it builds all of us up in our faith, as well as being a powerful witness.

So – for the church to be a disciple growing church, as individuals we have to be hungry to grow ourselves, and also ready to play our part in helping others to grow. And I think we'll see the same thing as we turn to the next of our characteristics of a healthy church – bearing one another's burdens.

READING

You might remember this if you were at the 10.45 service a couple of years ago. It is one of the most glorious sights: geese flying in formation. Seemingly effortlessly covering huge distances. But that formation flying isn't just for the benefit of bird watchers like me. It is essential for the geese.

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in "V " formation, the whole flock adds at least 70% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. So whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back in the V and another goose moves up to fly at the front. So the load is shared. When the geese honk, it isn't just for no reason – it is the way the ones behind encourage those at the front.

And when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gunshot, and falls out, two geese fall out of formation and follow him down to help and protect him. They stay with him until he is either able to fly or until he is dead, and then they launch out on their own or with another formation until they catch up with their group.

I know that God's creation is marvellous, but isn't it amazing that he has programmed into these birds how to care for one another! And what Paul says here in Galatians 6 is quite similar. The key verse is there in v.2 – *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ*. Like those geese, a healthy church will be one where the members genuinely care for one another. And Galatians 6 gives us some ways in which that should be happening.

First – Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. Gal.6:1

I wonder what your first reaction would be if you saw another member of Christ Church doing something inappropriate? Maybe ... you pop round unexpectedly, and find them watching something pretty steamy on the Internet. Or phoning in sick at work and then going playing golf! Or maybe you hear them running down another church member – saying something behind their back.

I know what the 2 most common reactions in our society would be. Either condemnation or avoidance. To go off and tell someone else – ‘You’ll never guess what I just saw so-and-so doing.’ Or if it something really serious to go and tell the press! Or – to pretend you didn’t see it. After all – what’s it got to do with you.

But there is a third option. It is far harder than the other two, but it is what you do if you care. *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.* You go and see them, Not to attack them for what they’ve done, but to help them. You do it humbly and gently. That doesn’t mean being soft on sin – after all the first step here is to recognise that what the person is doing is a sin. But what does the Lord wants if one of his children is sinning? Repentance and restoration.

Of course if you do go and see someone like that, they might tell you where to go. That’s what makes it difficult. And there is another risk: *But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* Gal.6:1. We are all vulnerable. Coming alongside someone like that can expose you to temptation. But if you care about someone, you’ll take the risk, because you know that that sin is spoiling their relationship with the Lord, and you want the best for them.

Second: **Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.* Gal 6:2. Life can be pretty tough at times. In the words of REM’s song – Everybody hurts. It is a feature of living in a fallen world, and Christians are not immune. But when you feel as if life is crushing you for some reason, there should be someone there to help. And then when your crisis has passed, there will be someone else going through the mill, and it will be your turn to carry their burden. And when you do that – you fulfil the law of Christ, which I think is a reference to Jesus’ new commandment in John 13: *A new commandment I give you: Love one another.* How do we do that? By Carrying one another’s burdens.

Third: **Each one should test his own actions.* Galatians 6:4. You see, one thing that will stop you from caring for others is when you are so full of yourself that you don’t think about anyone else. The world is full of people who think they are something when they are nothing. Completely self-focussed. They think that the world exists for their benefit. They don’t like it if things aren’t done just the way they think they should be, or if other people don’t do just what they want. I guess we all know people like that.

But I hope we don't find people like that in Christ Church. Because that is the very opposite of caring. And then – *for each one should carry his own load*. Hang on – what did Paul say 3 verses earlier? *Carry each other's burdens*. Has he changed his mind?

No – there are 2 different words. In v.3, 'burdens' is a heavy weight, but in v.3 'load' is like a small backpack. In other words, God has given me work to do, and I can't expect someone else to do it instead. But at times I might face a really tough, draining situation, and then I can expect the rest of you to come alongside and help me.

And fourth: *Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor*. Gal.6:6. That might sound as if that is just about caring for the clergy, but it is actually flagging up something important. Instruction in the word is vital for Christians – in his great prayer on the night before his death Jesus prayed for his disciples: *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*. John 17:17. If we care about one another in Christ Church, we will want others to grow more like Jesus. And that happens as God's word is carefully taught. So if we are a caring church we will be making sure that those who have responsibilities as teachers – our preachers and leaders, our Sunday Club leaders and so on, are supported in that work, because when they are, all of us benefit.

Restoring anyone who has fallen into sin, carrying the burdens of anyone who is struggling, not thinking too highly of ourselves, and supporting those who teach the word. All 4 are important in being and making disciples.

Restoring the sinner – obviously for the one who has fallen into sin, having those around them willing to take the risk of gently challenging them is vital. But it works the other way as well. How would you react if you knew you had been doing something inappropriate, and someone else from Christ Church spoke to you about it? Would you immediately be defensive? Would you be willing to admit your sin and allow them to support you?

Carrying burdens. Of course, we need to be willing to do that for others. But, I can only help with your burden if you will let me. Carrying each other's burdens involves being humble enough to admit we have a burden.

Not thinking too much of yourself. Nobody in Christ Church is actually more important than anyone else.

And supporting those who teach the word. You will only do that if you are hungry to have the word taught.

So if we want to be growing disciples, caring for one another like this is essential. But not easy, of course. *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* Gal. 6:7-8

This sort of caring involves consistently putting others first. Not just your family and your friends, but all the other people who make up the church here. And it something you have to keep on doing: *Let us not become weary in doing good.* Don't give up! It is a sort of care that doesn't happen much in the world. It goes against fallen human nature. There will always be something in you which does want to think too highly of yourself, and which will not want to be put out by carrying someone else's burdens. That something is called sin.

But as a Christian, there is something different at work in you – the Holy Spirit. He is the one who enables you to care like this. You see, this picture of caring is also a picture of the Lord Jesus. What did Jesus do when he found someone who had fallen into sin? *'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'* John 8:11.

What did Jesus do when confronted by those struggling with life? *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Matthew 11:28.

Did Jesus think too much of himself? After all, he was God the Son! *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Mark 10:45.

What was Jesus' priority in his earthly ministry? *He said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'* Luke 4:43.

And that is the final reason why carrying one another's burdens is essential to being and making disciples. If we are Jesus' disciples, we will want to be more like him.

No one can thrive as a Christian on their own. I know that people say you can be a Christian without going to church, I know people who think that they can faithfully follow Jesus without being part of church. But it just doesn't work. We need one another. We need to be ready to restore others, to carry their burdens, not to think too much of ourselves, and to hunger for God's word being taught. And we need to allow others to do those things for us.

A healthy church is one where that is happening.