

## **The Rev. Ben Jones:**

Be in the name of God.

Amen.

(Blank Audio)

I never thought I'd be using my notes like this.

(Laugh) They're really coming in handy.

My name is Bennett Jones. For those of you that don't know me, Charlie and Billy are away with members of the congregation, scalloping in a town whose name

am I can't pronounce? That's it. Thank you. So you don't need a theology degree to understand how our culture worships and what our culture worships. We can just pull a few gems from pop culture. Take Top Gun: Maverick. That word says it all. The lone gun, the lone wolf, the guy who's overconfident and breaks the rules to save the day. Or take Miley Cyrus. She wrote a song called Flowers, and in it the lyrics include, "I can buy myself flowers. I can love me better than you can." Now, in fairness, it's a breakup song, but make no mistake, it's a celebration of radical self-sufficiency. And then there are shows like Survivor, Alone. These sort of gems from pop culture illustrate what we worship. That is yours truly. We worship ourselves. We worship the me, the I. You do you. Find what's true to you. Be your authentic self. Create your own identity. This is the world that we live in, and Christians are not immune to this kind of thinking. And we don't really need to look much farther than Galatians 6 verse 1. If anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in gentleness. It's 2025. In what universe is that going to happen? Because I mean, think about it. Who am I to judge? Or who are you to judge me? That's our culture talking. That's the way we think as individuals. Paul thinks very differently or thought very differently. His worldview was more collective. It's not that he and other first century people didn't have a concept of the individual. Surely they did. Of course, from a philosophical point of view, individualism is only what? A couple hundred years old? All right, so it's relatively recent. In Paul's day, it was really impossible for them to think of themselves as individuals apart from the community, the family, the community, the synagogue, or, in the case of Christians, the church. So what I want to do is I want to walk us through just the first five verses of Galatians 6 because it's so countercultural and we need to cut through our own worldviews and the way we hear various words and cut through that to get at what Paul's trying to tell us and then look at how we can apply the principles that are there to our church today. So verse 1, "If anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

Now in our worldview, we hear "you," "you," who have received the Spirit as "me." You, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, who have received the Spirit. But in the Greek, the "you" is "yaw." It's plural. Paul is talking to an entire church and thinking of them collectively. "You," St. Mark's, "you," who have received the Spirit, and by the way, that's just what a church is. A church is filled with people who have received the Spirit in baptism.

So Paul is talking about the church in Galatia. You have received the Spirit should restore this person, whoever he or she might be, and by the way, they are also filled with the Spirit because they are part of the congregation. They're part of the church. Paul recognizes that people are going to fail, and they need to be restored by the church. So it's a, it's a collective thing, and when we hear "you," who have received the Spirit, it's very easy for us to think, you know, spiritual types, the holier than thou. And that's how, what, that's what we worry about. When we confront someone, we're always worried about coming across as holier than thou. That's our culture talking. And Paul, in Paul's way of thinking, those who have received the Spirit they are operating under the fruit of the Spirit that we read last week in chapter 5. Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, not necessarily in that order.

Okay, that's the, that's what the body of Christ is all about. They operate under this fruit. Or we can go from, go to a different letter. First Corinthians chapter 12, where Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit, and he makes a point of reminding people that no one's gift is better than the other. There's no reason for spiritual superiority, and then to really drive the point home, he follows that up with chapter 13, that famous chapter on love, where love is elevated above everything else. So we need to be clear when we read this verse that we're, first of all, it's about us as the church and secondly it's not about spiritual superiority, it's not about being holier than thou, it's about people who live according to the fruit of the Spirit and the law of love. And this leads Paul into verse 2, "Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ." Now, the burdens that he's talking about are related to the transgression that he mentioned. It means more than that, but it doesn't mean less than that. And why is it a burden? When someone transgresses, they are falling back into slavery to sin. And so they need to be released from that, they need to be restored from that, and freed from that. That's the idea, and it's the church's responsibility to bear this burden. Now there's more to it than that, as you'll hear me talk about in a moment when I talk about you know how we can make this, you know, how can we apply this to our lives today. There's the part of just carrying the burden of being the church. So that's included. And then just in case people don't get it, he warns them one more time, "For if those who think they are something, excuse me, for if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves, all must test their own work." In other words, in this business of restoring people and building up the body, carrying the burdens of the church, check your heart. What are your motives? Where are you coming from? Because Paul recognizes it's very easy once we start restoring someone for us to think, "Oh, I'm so much better. Look at me. I'm a great person." Paul's warning against that. And then finally, "Each must carry their own loads." Now that might sound like a contradiction to his command to carry the burdens of the church, but it's a different word. "Loads" is like a backpack. What he's getting at is personal responsibility

within mutual belonging. I have a responsibility as a member of the body of Christ to take my place and bear my part, to carry my load, which is my work and role in building up the body of Christ and helping the church just be the church. Okay, so that, in a nutshell, is what Paul is talking about in those first five verses. Now how can we might apply this? And I want to talk first of all from my own experience and talk about it in terms of a deeper level of how this might work in a congregation. And then I want to talk a little bit about entry-level ways that we can begin to carry the burdens of St. Mark's. So when I was a young priest, younger priest, I was the rector of St. Paul's in Munster, Indiana, from 2000 to 2010. And one of the things that I did was I had the vestry meet twice a month. One was for work and the other was for Bible study and prayer. And my goal was to create a small group to turn the vestry into a people who worked

together, prayed together, studied together, we get to know each other, love one another, all that stuff. So I'd like to think that that set the stage for what happened a few years down the road. I'm an introvert. I'm an introvert's introvert. People don't believe me when I say that but tell me, get me at a party and notice how I don't talk. And I'm a wallflower. What would happen on Sunday morning is I would leave the room where I was teaching and I would have to walk through this one part of the church that was called the parlor in order to get to the vesting room. And you know in my mind I'm walking through and I'm looking at people, hey good morning, blah blah blah blah blah, and I'm on my way because usually I've got five minutes to get my vestments on and then you know get on with the service. So one day the senior warden came to see me and he said, "Ben, I'm hearing reports that people think you're cold and aloof." And I'm like, "Huh? What?" And he goes, "Now I don't think you're cold and aloof but obviously some people are getting that perception and it's happening on Sunday morning as you go through the parlor." And I went, "Oh okay, I can fix that problem." And I left early. I started leaving earlier from my class and when I got to the parlor I stopped, talked with people, shook their hands, and that was the end of that complaint. Never again, okay? Problem solved. But I can imagine that going in a completely different direction in our individualistic society and the way we tend to work in terms of conflict is we tend to live in our heads. There goes Ben what a jerk. You know, he doesn't stop and say hi to me. Doesn't he care? And all these kind of things go through our heads in the matter of seconds. And then what we don't do is tell Ben, but we tell other people, "Can you believe that so-and-so? He should know better. He's a priest for crying out loud. How come he doesn't know what to do? Meanwhile yours truly doesn't know that anything is wrong." All right? That's how we tend to work. And so thank God I had a senior warden with whom I had a relationship in which he felt that he could come to me and talk to me about something that was important. He was thinking about the church, about the people in the church, and the church as a whole, and me as its leader, and problem was solved. Okay? That's a deeper way in which this, the principle of Galatians 6 can get worked out. And obviously that takes work and it takes the right contexts in which we get to know people and know each other and all that kind of stuff. Now here are some entry-level ways in which you can carry your own load to bear the burden of being St. Mark's. Now here's the thing. Churches, I don't care what church they are, I don't care what denomination they are, churches exist for one reason. Worship. Everything else, everything else that a church does flows from worship. And I don't know if you know this, but worship doesn't magically happen. Now just before I go any further, I want to say that I've gotten to know a lot of people my age, retirement age, and many of you have been on vestries and you've been in ministry and all that kind of stuff and you've sort of done your time as it were, you're off the hook. You can pull out your phone and look at your Facebook page. The rest of y'all, okay,

bearing our load, carrying our own load means taking responsibility for helping St. Mark's be St. Mark's and do what St. Mark's does. And what are the things that happen just on Sunday morning? Reading, ushering, greeting, singing, bric- acolytes, what? Altregeld. Right, Altregeld. Did you know men could be on the altar guild? Just saying, just saying. Okay, there's all kinds of things that need to be done. Don't wait to be asked. Don't. Because if you're gonna carry your own load, go to someone and say, "I want to help, what can I do?" And let me just point out the river for just a moment. Now all the worship at St. Mark's is wonderful, that's why I'm here. When I go to the river as a priest, I look at what's going on there and I realize this takes a gargantuan amount of effort to pull off every week, week after week after week. So if you go to the river, and I know many of you go to this service and the river, think about the river. Go to Billy. Billy, what can I do? How can I help the river be successful? And I'm sure he's got plenty

of ideas for you to help out. Those are basic entry-level ways in which you can carry your own load and build up the body of Christ and help St. Mark's be St. Mark's. The only other thing I would say is that carrying your own load also includes taking responsibility for your own spiritual growth. You are the only one who can grow spiritually or decide to grow spiritually. No one's going to do that for you. And you are at a church where you're going to get a program guide in the next few weeks, I imagine, for the fall and oh my gosh, oodles and oodles of things to get plugged into in terms of Christian education and Bible study and all that kind of stuff. Get involved. Get into one. That's the kind of place where you're going to meet people, get to know people, and grow in the kind of relationships that you need to have in order to be the church, to be St. Mark's. And all of this comes just from this verse 5, "carry your own load." Because here's the thing, you were never meant to carry it all alone, but neither was your neighbor. Amen.