

Main Idea: In order to be a caring community as the Lord intends, we must fight for two things as spelled out in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

- I. In order to be a caring community, we must fight for the gospel of grace (chs 1-4).
  - A. The gospel of grace makes us right with God.
  - B. The gospel of grace makes us right with one another.
- II. In order to be a caring community, we must fight for one another (chs 5-6).
  - A. We are to serve one another (5:13).
  - B. We are not to bite and devour one another (5:15).
  - C. We are not to provoke and envy one another (5:26).
  - D. We are to bear one another’s burdens (6:2).
    1. We must help our brother who has a burden (1-4).
    2. We must help our brother bear his own burden (5).
    3. We must help our brother learn to bear his brother’s burden (1-4).

Make It Personal: Questions to ponder and discuss in this evening’s care groups...

1. What did we learn about caring for one another from Galatians?
2. What must we do in practical terms to “bear each other’s burdens”?
3. How can we as a church family show we care for the *children* of our church? How can we come alongside their parents? How can we demonstrate care to those children whose parents are not part of WBC? How can we organize our care groups to better facilitate Christlike care for our children?

I can’t put into words the incredible blessing it is to belong to a local church, but just a week ago the Lord reminded me once again how great this privilege is. I was 5,000 miles from home, teaching His Word to an interested group of people in Timisoara, Romania, when I got a series of texts from my wife.

The first text said, “Going to urgent care.” I knew she hadn’t been feeling well, with flu-like symptoms for the previous three days. Then came the second text, “They’re sending me to the emergency room. They don’t like my chest pain.” It wasn’t long before I heard that the elevated enzymes indicated a heart attack, and that she was being admitted to the cardiac floor of the hospital, and that a heart cath was scheduled for the next day.

And I was still 5,000 miles away. What do you do when the person you love more than anyone else on the planet, next to your Savior, is in need, and you are unable to be there for her? I can tell you what I did. First, I prayed, and the Lord brought to mind a picture from John 10:27-29, that reminded me that we are always in His hands. Next, I observed through text messages and phone calls that the Lord raised up other wonderful hands to provide the care I could not provide, the hands of our daughters and son-in-law, and the hands of our church family members. And I gave thanks to Him for those hands.

My flight brought me home on Monday evening just an hour or so after Sherry returned home from her time in the hospital. The whole experience was so timely. As you know, we’re in a series right now I’ve been calling, “*A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering.*”

That’s what the church is, and that’s what we have if we are in Christ. Not just a place to go on Sunday morning, but a people to live with, to do life with, to face challenging times with.

Brothers and sisters, we’re all going to face trials, and when we do, it’s good to know that the Lord has given us *everything* we need to honor Him in those trials. Specifically, He’s given us *the Book* and *the Body*, His promises and His people.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

We began our series by going to Philippians 2:1-5, where we discover that the church is called to be a caring community. In week two, in order to see a model of what the Spirit intends this caring community to be, we looked at the first church in Acts 2:42-47, and we saw a church that was devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to breaking bread, and to prayer.

But what does this activity of caring involve? We're answering that question by looking at the one another commands in the New Testament epistles. Last time we looked at Romans. Next time, the Lord willing, it will be Ephesians. But this morning, we'll turn our attention to the one another commands in Galatians.

Let me tell you at the outset what we're going to see. According to Galatians, in order to be a caring community as the Lord intends, we must learn to *fight*. That may surprise you, for we don't often associate *caring* and *fighting*. But in Galatians, they go together. To be a caring community, we must fight for two things as spelled out in Paul's letter to the Galatians. According to the first four chapters, we must fight for the gospel of grace. According to the final two chapters, we must fight for one another.

### I. In order to be a caring community, we must fight for the gospel of grace (chs 1-4).

And it is a fight. There is a tense tone in the letter Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, and you feel it from the outset. In most of Paul's letters, he begins with a pleasant word of thanks, a commendation, but there are no pleasantries at the beginning of this letter. Instead Paul jumps right into the alarming situation at hand.

He charges in 1:6-9, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Now those are fighting words! Why is Paul so upset? The background helps us appreciate the severity of the situation.

According to verse 2, Paul wrote this "to the churches in Galatia." Later, in 1:13, Paul speaks of the *church* of God, referring to the universal church. But here he addresses the *churches* in Galatia, referring to individual local churches.

There are basically two main options as to who these churches were, the north Galatia theory, and the south Galatia theory. I won't take time to develop the theories or the support for them, but will assume the south Galatia theory. According to this view, Paul wrote Galatians to the churches he helped establish during his first missionary journey in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, around 48 AD.

When Paul went to these cities, he preached the good news of Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection, and announced that if a sinner would repent and believe in Christ, that God would forgive that sinner and give him eternal life. And by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, many responded in each city, and churches were established.

But it didn't take long before Paul learned some disturbing news. Some false teachers had infiltrated those churches and attacked Paul's authority and message. "Who is this Paul, anyway?" they charged. "He's not one of the original twelve apostles. He doesn't have any proper authority. And his message is incomplete. He says you can be saved just by believing in Jesus. That's not true. He's ignoring all the laws of the Hebrew Scriptures. If you want to be saved from your sins, you must do what the Hebrew Scriptures command, what *God Himself* commands, starting with circumcision."

When word reached Paul of what these teachers were saying, it grieved him. And it incensed him. He cared for these churches (you'll recall he lost his life for them when he was stoned in Iconium, and later restored; see Acts 14), and he knew that the revised gospel message these false teachers were spreading would destroy these young churches.

There was no time to lose. So Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, began to dictate a letter (he actually wrote the final verses himself to authenticate it; see 6:11). His first order at hand? To fight for the gospel of grace.

Fight? Should Christians ever fight? For the gospel, we should. Why? Why should we fight for the gospel? Because, as Paul explains in this letter, the gospel alone can meet our two greatest needs.

**A. The gospel of grace makes us right with God.** That's the theme of the first four chapters of Galatians, where the word "gospel" appears ten times. The message of religion says you can reach God by doing things for Him. The message of the gospel of grace says there's nothing you can do to reach Him, that He must reach and save you, and that's what He has done, by His grace. By His grace, He sent His Son, Jesus the Christ, into the world. By His grace, He judged Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners. By His grace, He raised Jesus from the dead and now offers eternal life to any sinner who will stop trusting in his own supposed good deeds and put his total trust in Jesus.

That is the gospel of grace, and you can't add works to grace or it's no longer grace. Grace means *unmerited favor*. God extends His *unmerited*, undeserved, unsolicited favor and help to those who, if they received what they deserve, would perish forever in hell. But on the basis of His merciful purpose to pardon sinners, God gives sinners what they do not deserve and could never earn, a forever place in His family, and He gives it on the basis of what His Son deserves.

Friends, the gospel of grace makes us right with God. It also raises some questions, questions that Paul addresses in the first section of his letter.

One, where did Paul get this message? It sounds too good to be true. He tells us in 1:11-12, "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

A second question, what did the other apostles think of Paul's message and ministry of grace? Paul tells the Galatian churches in 2:8-9, "For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."

A third question, so if God saves people on the basis of His grace and not on the basis of their works, what must we do to benefit from this gospel of grace? It's a one word answer. *Faith*. Not a past tense, mental agreement, generic sort of faith, but a total trust in the person and work of Jesus faith, as Paul illustrates by his own testimony in 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

A fourth question, is there objective support for this gospel of grace? The false teachers say, "Don't believe it." Paul says, "Believe it." Why should I believe that God justifies sinners on the basis of Christ's work alone, apart from any work they do? Paul gives a series of proofs to support his message in chapters 3 & 4.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I find the *NIV Study Bible's* outline very helpful in working through the support in chapters 3-4.

First, he points to the Galatians own experience in 3:1-5, and asks them a pointed question in 3:2, “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?”

Next, he tells them to think about the example of Abraham, in 3:6-9. “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (3:6).”

Then he reminds them of the curse of the law in 3:10-14. Sure, the law is good, since God gave it, but we can’t keep it, and if we start insisting that keeping the law is essential for salvation, we’re taking ourselves right back under the curse. “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse,” says Paul in 3:10. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,” he insists in 3:13.

Paul adds another support for his message in 3:15-18, as he shows the priority of promise in God’s redemptive plan, citing Abraham’s case. Abraham lived prior to the law, yet God in His grace gave an inheritance to Abraham, not on the basis of obeying the law, but “through a promise” (3:18).

So what then was the purpose of the law? That’s the question that Paul addresses in 3:19-25. He says plainly in 3:24-25, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

That leads to another reason. The law makes us slaves, but the gospel of grace makes us sons of God, as Paul explains 3:26-4:7. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (4:4-5).”

Paul’s next defense is very personal. In 4:8-20 he reminds the Galatian churches of the dear relationship they enjoyed when he first came to them. He was willing to die for them, so they could have this message of grace. And they were willing to tear out their eyes and give them to him, such was their appreciation for this message of grace. “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,” he says in 4:19-20, “how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”

That brings Paul to his final support for this message of grace. In 4:21-31, he cites the contrast between Hagar and Sarah to illustrate the two options. There’s the law, and there’s grace. There’s the slave woman, Hagar, and there’s the free woman, Sarah. Which do you want, slavery or freedom? If you start adding works to grace, the inevitable result is slavery and bondage. “But what does the Scripture say?,” asks Paul in 4:30. “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.”

In a few minutes, we’re going to vote on some new member candidates. On what basis do we bring someone into this church? On the same basis we entered, on the basis of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Friends, the gospel is worth fighting for. If we lose the gospel of grace, we end up in bondage and forfeit the only message that can make a sinner right with God.

But Paul doesn’t end his letter after chapter four. That’s significant, and here’s why. The gospel doesn’t just make us right with God, but it also meets our second greatest need.

**B. The gospel of grace makes us right with one another.** This too is a major thrust of this letter. Paul isn’t writing a seminary textbook. He’s writing a letter to local churches filled with brothers and sisters in Christ that he cared for deeply. And why did he care for them? Because of what the gospel did for them. When they heard and believed the gospel, they were reconciled, not only to God, but also to the rest of those God has reconciled to himself, including him and each other.

Listen to the intense passion Paul expresses for his Galatian brethren in 4:17-20, “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”

Paul cared for these dear Galatians, enough to confront them about their precarious situation. He calls them his *dear children*, and says he’s in the *pains of childbirth* for them.

Friends, we’re family. The gospel makes us sons of God. That’s our position. But position misunderstood can lead to pride.

That makes me think of a dog we had when I was growing up. The position of being the family dog went to his head. Barney had 120 acres to call his own, and he did. One summer I started running the neighborhood block, and a friendly Irish Setter started running with me, and then came home with me for a visit after our runs. Every time Barney saw Red approaching his domain, he pawed his turf, as if to say, “Listen. I am the family dog. You don’t belong here, and I don’t want you here. So go away.”

If we’re not careful, we can adopt that mindset too, *if we don’t remind ourselves regularly of the gospel truth*. Yes, we are in God’s forever family. But why? It’s not because we deserve it. It’s all because of His *grace*. He gave us what we did not deserve—forgiveness, a place at His table, an eternal inheritance. And why? He gave it to us, not because we deserved it, or did something to merit it, but solely for Jesus’ sake. He saved us on the basis of the faith we placed in the work that His Son accomplished, and even that faith was a gift from Him.

So our position should never lead to pride, but instead to praise and thanks to the God of grace and His gospel of grace. But it mustn’t stop there. If we’re really thankful for grace, it will show up in a willingness to fight for something else, not just for the gospel, but for *one another*.

## II. In order to be a caring community, we must fight for one another (chs 5-6).

Not fight *with* one another, of course, but *for* one another. Paul gives four “one another” commands in Galatians 5-6. And these commands help us understand more fully what being a caring community is all about.

**A. We are to serve one another (5:13).** Notice 5:13, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Paul’s critics said his message of grace gave people a license to sin. Not so, says Paul. The gospel of grace does set us free. But it doesn’t set us free to live however we want. It sets us free to *serve one another*.

That’s the point Jesus made in the upper room, didn’t He? After assuming the role of a slave and washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus said in John 13:14, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”

What does it mean to be a caring community? It means we’re looking for ways to serve one another. We’re constantly asking, “What needs do you have that I can meet?” Of course, we won’t know what the needs are if we’re not involved in each other’s lives. That’s one the things we’re trying to facilitate in our Sunday evening care groups, creating opportunities to know each other better so we can serve each other as Christ commands.

**B. We are not to bite and devour one another (5:15).** Listen to 5:14-15, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you

keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

Unfortunately, there’s far too much biting and devouring that goes on between followers of Christ, and it often has to do with the very issues Paul addresses in Galatians. When you start adding law to the gospel of grace, it results in condescending pride, because some of us are convinced we’re keeping the laws better than others, and that leads to squabbles.

Let me give you an example. Did you know that Billy Graham began his college education at Bob Jones University? It’s true. He *began* at BJU, but he didn’t finish there. Justin Taylor tells the story:

In December of 1936, a depressed and dejected 18-year-old named Billy Graham sat chewing his fingernails in the office of his 56-year-old college president, Bob Jones Sr. The patriarch of fundamentalism had learned that Billy and a fellow classmate were planning to transfer from Bob Jones College (in Cleveland, Tennessee) to Florida Bible Institute (just outside of Tampa).

Billy’s first semester had been marked by sickness, bad grades, and a “stack of demerits” for falling short of the school’s strict standards. After learning about the planned transfer, Dr. Jones gave Billy a warning and a prediction:

“Billy, if you leave and throw your life away at a little country Bible school, the chances are you’ll never be heard of. At best, all you can amount to would be a poor country Baptist preacher somewhere out in the sticks.”

Given the network of fundamentalism, it was not an unreasonable prediction. But of course it turned out to be quite wrong.

The relationship between the two men was repaired before it ruptured again. Twelve years after this meeting (1948), Bob Jones University would confer on Billy Graham—then the president of Northwestern Baptist Bible College in Minneapolis—an honorary doctorate. In March of 1950 Graham held an evangelistic rally on the campus of BJU (now located in Greenville, SC). (The mayor ordered the stores in town to close and the schools were dismissed early for the event.)

Billy had formed a friendship with Bob Jones Sr. and Jr., with Billy inviting criticism and guidance from “Dr. Bob.”<sup>2</sup>

I love that story. It illustrates that when you really believe the gospel of grace, not just academically but to the point that you are living in light of it, you want to exhibit the fruit of it. And what’s the fruit of grace? It’s *graciousness*. Those who preach, “By grace are you saved through faith,” have reason to be the most gracious people on the planet.

How do you treat people with whom you differ? Paul’s critics attacked him, and the Galatians were turning from him. But he wouldn’t let them go. Yes, he fought for the gospel of grace, but he also fought for them, too.

And he urged them to do the same. Serve one another. Don’t bite and devour one another. Thirdly, he made it clear that...

**C. We are not to provoke and envy one another (5:26).** Take a look at 5:26, “Let us not become conceited, provoking [NAS ‘challenging,’ NRSV ‘competing against’] and envying each other.” Any junior high school teacher knows what provoking is. When a fist flies in the lunchroom, you want to know who or what provoked this outburst. To provoke means “to irritate, to call out a challenge.”

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<sup>2</sup> Justin Taylor, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/05/09/bob-jones-sr-to-billy-graham-a-bad-prediction-some-good-advice/>

Don't do that in the church, says Paul. And of course, the act of provoking starts with a heart activity, *envying*, "to be jealous, to have a feeling of ill will due to a real or presumed advantage experienced by someone else."

"How come we always do things *your way*? I demand we do what I want this time, or I'm leaving." That's provoking and envying one another, and it has no place in the relationships of people who believe the gospel of grace. But this does...

**D. We are to bear one another's burdens (6:2).** Here's how the NIV puts it in 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Paul ends this letter by talking about burden-bearing. That's certainly a theme that even the law-preachers in Galatia couldn't avoid, for even the Mosaic Law calls for burden-bearing.

Exodus 23:5 says, "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."

Quite frankly, it's not easy to bear people's burdens, as Moses himself confessed to the Lord in Numbers 11:11-12, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the *burden of all these people on me*? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?"

I'm encouraged by what the Lord said to Moses in verse 17, "I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. *They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.*"

So the Law talks about burden-bearing. What did Paul say about it? He calls us to engage in three phases of burden-bearing in the church.

1. *We must help our brother who has a burden (1-4).* In verse 1 Paul gives a hypothetical situation of a person who becomes trapped in sin. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

Why this scenario? As Wiersbe observes, "Because nothing reveals the wickedness of legalism better than the way the legalists treat those who have sinned."<sup>3</sup> Remember the woman the Pharisees threw on the ground before Jesus in John 8? And remember how the so-called religious mob almost tore Paul limb from limb because they *thought* he had brought a Gentile into the temple? As Wiersbe explains, "Legalists do not need facts and proof; they need only suspicions and rumors. Their self-righteous imaginations will do the rest."<sup>4</sup>

What does a brother who is caught under the weight of sin need? You say, "He needs Jesus." That's true. Jesus is the ultimate burden bearer. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Jesus Himself said in Matthew 11:29-30, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

So our burdened brother needs Jesus. But how will Jesus lift this sinner's burden? Here's how. Paul says that He intends to work through the *spiritual* in the church. Not just the pastors or deacons, but the spiritual. And who are they? Not some elite group of super-saints, but those who've experienced the saving grace of Christ and are now exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit that Paul just identified in 5:22-23.

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ga 6:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ga 6:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

And what are these Spirit-filled church members to do? *Restore* this fallen brother. The Greek word, *katarizo*, is a medical term that means, “to set a broken bone so it functions again as intended.” That’s what needs to happen. Burden-bearers are spiritual bone-setters. They help their brother who is caught in sin. They help him by confronting his sin. They help him by showing there’s a way out of his sin. And they walk with him on that path out of sin, and in so doing, they restore him so he can once again function for the glory of Christ in the caring community.

The legalist doesn’t do that. He points fingers. He condemns. He adds burdens. Jesus said this about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

Wiersbe is right when he observes, “The legalist is always harder on other people than he is on himself, but the Spirit-led Christian demands more of himself than he does of others.”<sup>5</sup>

And when he sees a brother who’s down, he goes after his brother on a mission of mercy. But that’s only phase one of the burden-bearing process. First, we must help our brother who has a burden.

2. *We must help our brother bear his own burden (5)*. Notice verse 5, “For each one should carry his own load.” Does verse 5 contradict verse 2? No. They are actually different words. In verse 2, the word is *baros*, referring to a heavy weight or load. In verse 5, it’s *phortion*, a common term for a lighter load, like a man’s pack or a soldier’s kit. So verse 2 is saying we have a responsibility to help a brother who is carrying a burden too heavy to handle alone. But verse 5 says that same man must learn, as we all must, to carry his own lighter loads.<sup>6</sup>

So when a brother can’t carry his load, we’re to help him. But we’re to help him in such a way that he learns to carry his own loads. But there’s one more phase in the process.

3. *We must help our brother learn to bear his brother’s burden (1-4)*. What we did for our brother in verse 1, our brother must learn to do. Instead of being on the receiving end, he needs to be on the giving end. Since he’s no longer caught in sin, he’s called to help those who are.

That’s what a caring community is all about. When we see burdens, we bear them. And then we teach people to bear their own burdens. And then we teach those whose burdens we have lifted to bear others’ burdens.

So what’s involved in being a caring community? According to Galatians, it’s a call to fight. We cannot be passive. We must fight for the gospel of grace, and we must fight for one another.

#### Make It Personal: Questions to ponder and discuss in this evening’s care groups...

1. *What did we learn about caring for one another from Galatians?*
2. *What must we do in practical terms to “bear each other’s burdens”?*
3. *How can we as a church family show we care for the children of our church? How can we come alongside their parents? How can we demonstrate care to those children whose parents are not part of WBC? How can we organize our care groups to better facilitate Christlike care for our children?*

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<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ga 6:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe’s example. “If my car breaks down, my neighbor can help drive my children to school, but he cannot assume the responsibilities that only belong to me as their father. That is the difference. It is wrong for me to expect somebody else to be the father in our family; that is a burden (and a privilege) that I alone can bear.” Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ga 6:1). Victor Books.