

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 7-30-17

July 30 we will study Galatians 6:1-3. Discussion questions are:

1. Churches have personalities. How many church personality types can you think of?
 - a. What determines a church's personality?
 - b. What characteristics of a grace-driven church can you find in 6:1-2, 4-6, 9-10?
 - c. What characteristics of a law-driven church can you find in 5:15, 26; 6:3-4; 5:19-21; 6:12-13?
2. What is "the law of Christ"? (6:2) [Does the phrase "in this way" help define the law of Christ?]
3. If a church is in the habit of making prideful comments about their theology, how does it affect someone looking for a church home?
4. How do you know if someone comes to church carrying a heavy burden?
5. Is there another way to "be restored" other than coming forward during a church service?
 - a. What is the value of public restoration? What is the weakness?
 - b. What is the value of one-on-one restoration? What is the weakness?
6. What does a restored Christian look like? How do they fit in at church?
7. How do Home Teams help with the charge of bearing one another's burdens?
 - a. What has to happen before a Home Team could effectively restore someone?
8. Why is this statement true: "When the church acts in love to strengthen those who struggle, it offers hope to the world."

Sermon: *I Cannot Bear These Burdens Alone*

Churches have personalities just like individuals do. Some churches are vibrant; some are dull. Some churches are peaceful; some like to fight. Some churches are secure; some are frightened. Some churches are warm; some are cold. Some churches are loving; some are hostile. Some churches are happy; some are angry. Some churches are liberating; some are controlling. To a great extent a church's personality is formed by how they see the grace of God.

When Paul wrote Galatians he was deeply concerned about a personality change in those churches. They were changing from free in Christ to enslaved by law keeping. They were changing from being accepting to people of other races to being clannish. They were changing from relying on the Holy Spirit to relying on themselves. They were changing from humble to arrogant.

This morning I want us as a church to take a personality inventory. What is at the very core of our personality? Do Paul's words in Galatians 5:26 apply to us? "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." I have to tell you it makes me very uncomfortable to hear someone speak condescendingly of those who are more

conservative than we. It bothers me deeply when prideful comments are made about contemporary worship or traditional worship. The very next verse in Galatians gives specific instruction about how to react to the spirit of pride in a church. “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. Carry each other’s burdens....” (Galatians 6:1-2)

Every time you walk in the doors of this building you stand with burdened people all around you. Those folks have come here to find relief, not to have their burdens increased. Many of them have come here because they cannot any longer carry their burden alone. The question for each of us is, “Am I a blessing to those who come to this building burdened?” In Paul’s day the answer was a resounding “No!” Even Peter had joined ranks with those who were increasing the burden of those who came looking for rest. Strife among the saints was a “work of the flesh” not a “fruit of the spirit.” Paul’s instructions are very specific, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:26)

Max Lucado shares this interesting story, “A friend of mine was recently trying to teach his six-year-old son how to shoot a basket. The boy would take the basketball and push it as hard as he could toward the goal, but it always fell short. The father would then take the ball and toss it toward the basket, saying, ‘Just do it like this, son. It’s easy.’ “Then the boy would try, and miss again. My friend would then take the ball and make another basket, encouraging his son to push the ball a bit harder. After several minutes and many misses, the boy responded to his father by saying, ‘YEAH, BUT IT’S EASY FOR YOU UP THERE. YOU DON’T KNOW HOW HARD IT IS FROM DOWN HERE.’”

Legalists have the uncanny ability of applying the law more harshly toward others than toward themselves. The legalist concentrates on his strengths and the weaknesses of others. Thus the scribes and Pharisees were ready to stone the woman guilty of adultery, yet they were insensitive to their own breach of the law by taking advantage of the helpless, the neglect of their responsibilities to their own families, or their persecution of the righteous.

Legalism has no interest in reducing the burdens that men must bear. Instead, it produces burdens and then refuses to assist those on whom they are imposed. Jesus contrasted Himself with the scribes and Pharisees with respect to burdens:

“And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matthew 23:4)

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and my load is light” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Bearing the burden of others is a Jesus thing to do. It's what Paul calls "the law of Christ." "Carry each other's burdens, and *in this way* you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2). When we refer to each other as brothers and sisters we are acknowledging our willingness to bear each other's burdens like Jesus did. The goal of bearing someone else's burden is to "restore" them. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." (Galatians 6:1) It was May 21, 1972 when Laslow Toa, a demented mad man with a hammer, jumped past 5 uniformed guards at the Vatican and began striking the Pieta, Michelangelo's sculpture of Mary holding the body of Jesus just removed from the cross. He chipped the nose, part of an eye, some of the face, 13 pieces of the garment, and knocked off the entire left arm before anyone could stop him. Pope Paul VI, stunned and crying, bemoaned, "It will never be the same." He did not know the power of restoration. Skilled restorers began working on the Pieta. Just 4 days before Christmas, 1972, the Pieta was unveiled. If you see it now, you cannot tell it was ever cracked, broken and restored. What those men did with a piece of marble, God wants to do for broken souls and he wants you to be involved in the process, if you are spiritual and have a gentle spirit.

This very morning there are people sitting very close to you who have been restored. There sits a man who once would do anything to make a buck. He's been restored. Today he is a forgiven man with a generous heart. There sits a woman who once broke her marriage vows. She's been restored. Today she is a forgiven woman with a pure heart and a spotless marriage. There sits a young person who once experimented with forbidden things. That young person has been restored. Today that young person lives a clean, straight life and influences other young people to follow Jesus. "Restored!" What a great concept!

There are lots of folks here today who identify with Max Lucado's story of Chippie the Parakeet. Chippie the Parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said 'hello' when 'sssopp!' Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie—still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted

Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore—he just sits and stares."

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . that's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

I suspect that all of us here this morning have felt like Chippie at one time or another. Our dreams have been dashed, our spirits have been shattered, and our world has been turned upside down. And just like Chippie, we never saw it coming. One minute we were just singing away, and the next we had been blown over by one of life's many storms. In spite of all our pious platitudes, the plain truth is this: life can be very, very difficult at times. And sometimes it can be more than we can bear alone. That's when we need a spiritual brother or sister to bear the burden and gently lead us to restoration. God knew that we would need each other to make it through this life. He knew that none of us is strong enough or self-sufficient enough to make it totally on our own.

Can I ask you a personal question this morning? If you are not part of a Home Team, how are you going to make it when the going gets tough spiritually? God thinks you need brothers and sisters who know you, love you, and will bear your burden and restore you when you are broken. You think you don't need anybody. You have made it so far through life on your own and you can make it the rest of the way on your own. In other words when God instructed us to bear one another's burdens, He didn't know about you! All you need is to show up for worship, make a little small talk in the foyer, drop a few bucks in the basket and you are good for the whole week. If God had only known how self-sufficient you are He could have saved Himself a lot of trouble. God probably had you in mind when he inspired Paul to add one more line to this business of bearing each other's burdens. It's in verse 3, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

What is it going to take to convince you that you need others to help you in your spiritual journey? For Peter it took the accusing voice of a young girl. For Paul it took being blinded for 3 days. For John Mark it took going home in shame and explaining to family and friends why he quit his ministry. For David it took the death of his baby. For Saul it took the loss of his kingdom. For Moses it took an embarrassing confrontation by his father-in-law. What is it going to take to convince you? Will you have to be caught in an embarrassing sin? Will God have to lay you on your back in a hospital bed, wondering if this is "it"? Will you have to see your own child lose his or her way in life? Will you have to watch your marriage disintegrate? What is it going to take to convince you that you need brothers and sisters to help you in your spiritual journey?

Perhaps someone near you is really hurting. What burden can you lift? Or perhaps someone is really struggling with a sin pattern in his or her life that they just can't seem to get free of. What involvement could you have that would strengthen them and allow them to live with greater freedom?

Perhaps you yourself need to ask for help. You've been hiding, denying, and pretending

about things in your life. There is a weight that is crushing you, and you hoped it would go unnoticed. But you know it's there, and you need help.

When you allow a brother or sister to help bear your burden it benefits more than just you. When the church acts in love to strengthen those who struggle, it offers hope to the world.