

Prioritizing Church as Family  
Gal. 5:25-6:10  
Central Baptist Church  
September 5, 2021

Introduction

**[TITLE SLIDE 01]** In this series called 'Coming Home', we are highlighting several aspects of what it looks like to emerge from the period of enforced separation and begin to meet, worship, and serve once again in person. As we noted last week, the trip 'home' is not so smooth or quick as we were hoping it would be. The question we're asking, 'what are some biblical priorities that deserve attention as we seek to be a healthy, Spirit-filled community?'

The title of our message today is "Prioritizing Church as Family". Before we turn to some very practical observations from our passage in Galatians, I want to emphasize that behind this title there is a) a heartfelt desire and b) a high calling

*Our heartfelt desire is that every person who is a part of Central Baptist Church would feel accepted, loved, connected, and cared for as a family member.* There is a well-known saying that goes something like this, 'you can choose your friends, but you're stuck with your family'. Here's how it works in this family. When you chose to become a follower of Jesus, you got stuck with me as your brother. Not only that, the astounding truth of Christian faith is that when you receive the gift of new life from Jesus, you become part of the ONE family of believers from all nations from all eras of history.

Where the rubber hits the road, however, is right here in this room. Look around you in this room. These are your family members. Whether or not you know them, whether or not you agree with them, whether or not you like them, they are your brothers and sisters.

Let me say this again... *Our heartfelt desire is that every person who is a part of Central Baptist Church would feel accepted, loved, connected, and cared for as a family member.*

Behind this title is also a very high calling – in fact, I want to suggest that on a human level, it is an impossibly high calling! Let me try to clarify what I mean.

Question: as the world out there looks at our Central Baptist church family, how are they supposed to know that we are disciples of Jesus? By what measure? What did Jesus say? By the kind of love we have for one another.

That means this must be a distinct kind of love, noticeable. A kind of love that stands out far and above the normal human kind of loving. What does this kind of love look like?

There are many characteristics of this love, but one that is most appropriate for our times, I believe, is that this love enables us to know how to disagree and yet continue to love each other deeply. The family of God ought to be a place where our relationships are robust enough that we may hold radically differing views on some significant issues, and yet at the same time, hold each other in high esteem and continue to walk together in love and unity. This is impossible, if we just try to do this by being nice people in our own strength.

The call of many New Testament texts is for us to be a family that is known for selfless love and Spirit-empowered radical unity.

Please note how the apostle Paul issues this call in our passage today:

**[SLIDE 02] “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:25)**

- We don’t have time now but let me urge you to look back at the context of Galatians here – Paul has been celebrating the freedom that we have in the Spirit, but also clarifying what freedom is and what it isn’t.
  - He has also been contrasting what he calls the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit
  - He calls us to put to death the works of the flesh and live into the fruitfulness of the Spirit, characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Now, in our text, he goes on to ask this question: what does a community or a family that is in step with the Spirit look like??
  - Let me summarize his answer.

**[SLIDE 03] A community (family) in step with the Spirit is marked by healthy attitudes and actions toward others and ourselves.**

- Before we look at the text, let’s do some self-examination
  - How are your attitudes toward others, especially fellow believers, right now?
    - Be honest. What about that person who is just very difficult to communicate with?
    - I confess that as I examine my own heart, I have to say that it is a very difficult thing to consistently have a healthy attitude toward people around me. I find myself either thinking down (I’m slightly better); or else thinking more highly than I should (they become idols for me).
    - Our 2<sup>nd</sup> question, though, is unmistakably intertwined with this question
  - What is your attitude toward yourself right now?
    - What is your self-talk like these days? Do you have a poor view of yourself?
    - Or do you have a view that is too puffed up? Too much pride?
    - By the way Paul writes these next verses, I believe he is very aware that our attitude toward ourselves directly affects the way we are able to view others...

Once again, our text wants to say this to us: **A community in step with the Spirit is marked by healthy attitudes and actions toward others and ourselves**

There are several ways to look at the flow of these verses. Here’s how I have come to see Paul’s flow of thought...

**[SLIDE 04] Four pairs of healthy attitude/actions**

<u>To others</u>	<u>To self</u>
Don’t be conceited (5:25)	‘Boast’ in oneself alone (6:3-4)
Gently restore (6:1a)	Watch yourself (6:1b)
Carry each other’s burdens (6:2)	Carry your own load (6:5)
Do good to all (6:7-10)	Don’t sow to please the flesh (6:7-10)

First:

- Toward others – don’t be conceited (5:26)
  - **[SLIDE 05] “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” (26)**
  - Notice this is the first attitude following the phrase “let us keep in step with the Spirit”
  - Def: “excessive pride in oneself” (Oxford)

- To be conceited is to look down on others; to think of them as of a lower value or status
  - A few verses earlier, Paul had given a strong warning (5:15) *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*
- Can I call us to very careful self-examination here? When I hear the word ‘conceit’, I would immediately say – I don’t think I’m conceited.
  - But when I think about someone who holds a very different view from me, say for example, on the currently controversial topics surrounding vaccinations and the pandemic, I find myself easily having an attitude of superiority, because of course, I’m right and they are wrong...
- Please note what Paul is saying and what he is not saying – he is NOT saying that we all need to agree with each other. Unity is not found by all of us agreeing about everything. He IS saying that a family that is in step with the Spirit of God knows how to disagree with each other without looking down on someone who thinks differently....
  - There is NO room in God’s family for puffed up self-centeredness.
- Toward self - boast in oneself (6:3-4)
  - **[SLIDE 06]** *3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. (6:3-4) ESV*
    - What?? Paul, what do you mean??
  - Let me also give this to you in the NIV translation
    - **[SLIDE 07]** *3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else (6:3-4) NIV*
  - Obviously, he is not talking about the prideful boasting that is conceit; verse 3 is crystal clear about this and he is in fact saying that we should NOT compare ourselves with others.
  - Verse 4 has 3 phrases – let’s take each one carefully
    - *“each one should test their own actions”*; look carefully at who they are; discover who God has made them to be; ‘think soberly’ about who they are
    - *“Then they can take pride in themselves alone”*; instead of ‘pride’, other translations use words like ‘boast’, or ‘rejoice’. The idea seems to be that once you have discovered who you really are – you should celebrate this! Rejoice!
      - Psalm 139 says, ‘you knit me together in my mother’s womb’; Eph 2 says that ‘we are God’s handiwork’; Paul seems to be saying here – celebrate the person God made you to be!
    - *“without comparing themselves to someone else”*; oh, how hard this is to really live out! It is so easy to compare ourselves with someone better or someone worse!
      - I believe we often misunderstand humility. We often think humility is thinking less of myself. That’s NOT it! Humility is living up to the full height of who God made me to be, all the while realizing that I am a speck of dust in comparison to God’s infinite power and beauty; I receive who I am as a gift of grace from my loving Father.
  - I love the way Eugene Peterson has captured verse 4 in The Message:
    - **[SLIDE 08]** *Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. (MSG)*
    - By the way, if you want to explore some of these ideas further, look for a small booklet by Tim Keller called, ‘The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness’.
  - In summary then:
    - Our attitude toward others – don’t be conceited

- Toward ourselves – celebrate and live fully into who God made me to be without comparing myself with others!

## Second:

- Toward others - Gently restore (6:1)
  - **[SLIDE 09]** *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. (1a)*
  - “if someone is caught in a sin” – what responses are possible?
    - Ignore it...
      - This is often the easier response. But let us never forget that true freedom is not living however I want; nor is it giving other people the freedom to live however they want!
      - No, we are called to get involved when we see people wandering away from God’s good plan for human life as described in Scripture...
      - But how?
    - Condemn that person for their sin; perhaps reject and turn away from them
      - This sadly has been the response of many Christians, probably including most of us at times...
  - “...you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently”
    - Don’t miss any of the words in this phrase!
    - We don’t have time to go into the possible practical ways to do this... but can we be deeply challenged to be committed to this ministry of restoration together as brothers and sisters in a community that is in step with the Spirit of God?
- Toward self - Watchful guarding against temptation (6:1b)
  - **[SLIDE 10]** *“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” (1b)*
    - Without taking too much time, let me pass along an observation from one commentator who makes this suggestion
    - This is NOT necessarily a temptation to fall into the same sin as the person we are trying to restore
    - More likely, Paul is cautioning us who are restoring a brother who has fallen into sin, that we don’t fall into the temptation of looking down at him; of thinking that we are better and somehow immune from this kind of fall. This is most likely a temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we should. ‘After all, I didn’t fall into that sin.’
    - So guard your heart from this kind of prideful attitude as you reach out to restore a brother or sister gently...

So far then, we have seen 2 pairs:

- 1 Toward others - Not conceited (5:26)
  - Toward self - Take pride in oneself (6:3-4)
- 2 Toward others - Humble desire to restore (6:1)
  - Toward self - Watchful guarding against temptation (6:2)

## Thirdly:

- Toward others – Carry each other’s burdens (6:2)
  - **[SLIDE 11]** *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (2)*
  - What is the ‘law of Christ’? How did Jesus summarize the law?
    - Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength

- Love your neighbour as yourself
  - How do we carry each other's burdens?
    - We don't need to describe this in detail. We know what it means to feel cared for. We also probably know what it means to feel uncared for when life gets tough, when the storms of life come our way and the burdens of life get very heavy.
    - A community in step with the spirit is a place where people care and share; It's a place where people want to be because it's made up of people who are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
    - A community in step with the Spirit is a place where people are radically others-centered; not self-centered.
  - But how should I look toward myself as I care for others? Here we find a phrase that at first seems to contradict this one!
- Toward self - Carry your own load (6:5)
  - **[SLIDE 12] "For each will have to bear his own load." (5)**
  - How can we understand this?
    - First, notice that 'load' is a different word from 'burden' in verse two. 'Burden' is a word implying a very heavy load, something burdensome.
      - By contrast, 'Load' in verse 5 is a word used to describe a day pack that the Roman soldiers would carry.
    - In the flow of the text, this phrase seems to imply the idea of personal responsibility to work and provide for one's own needs.
    - A community in step with the Spirit is not one where people can simply choose not to work because 'my brothers and sisters' will look after me. In another place, Paul says, if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat.
    - So, it's a picture of each one of us in the community, living fully and enthusiastically into who God has made us to be, earning money to provide for ourselves and our families to the extent that we are able. But then, when that becomes impossible, we turn and carry each other's burdens.
  - Then, almost like an exclusion clause, Paul says,
    - 6 *"Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor."*
    - This is one of a number of places in Scripture where Paul instructs the church to provide financially for those who work hard to prepare and preach and feed the flock of God.
  - This, then is our 3<sup>rd</sup> pair of attitudes/actions
    - Carry each other's burdens
    - Each one should carry their own load.

**[SLIDE 13] Fourth and final pair: (6:7-10)**

- Toward others - Do good
- Toward self - Don't sow to please the flesh

This final pair seem to be like a summary statement encompassing all that has been said before. Listen very carefully as I read it slowly. Pay attention to the agricultural analogy.

*7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*

*8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [SLIDE 14]*

*9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

**[SLIDE 15 – PICTURE OF HARVEST]** My younger brother is working for a farmer right now in southern Alberta. It's harvest time. Several weeks ago, he sent us a picture of the combines and trucks they are using to harvest the crops. They have finished harvesting the peas and now they will start on the barley. Question: how did those peas get into those fields? Answer: they were planted there during the sowing season! Here is the principle: if you plant peas in sowing season, you will most likely reap peas in the harvest season. What could prevent the harvest? Drought or some other environmental disaster could prevent you from a good harvest. However, what will never happen? You will NEVER reap something completely different from what you sow. If you sow peas in a field, you will never reap barley from that field.

Please note the urgency in Paul's voice as he writes: 'do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked'.

- If you persistently sow seeds of self-centeredness and cultivate attitudes of conceit and arrogance, you will reap destruction.
- Instead, my brothers and sisters, let us not become weary in doing good!
  - Perhaps you, like me, have been part of a church or Christian organization in a season where relationships became toxic and characterized by self-centeredness rather than the kind of healthy attitudes and actions prescribed by Paul in our text today.
  - This is always a danger for us
  - This is especially a danger for us in our world today that is becoming polarized, not just on issues related to covid and vaccines, but in all kinds of areas!
  - We need to constantly come back to passages like this one to find perspective and seek to become agents of goodness and sowers of kindness.

We remind ourselves...

**[SLIDE 16]** Four pairs of healthy attitude/actions

<u>To others</u>	<u>To self</u>
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**[TITLE SLIDE 17]** We conclude with a practical tip and a final reminder.

- Practical tip: How to disagree and still love each other
  - From Alpha Marriage course
  - [role play – invite Ian to join me on stage]
  - Instead of allowing the issue to sit between you, intentionally sit side by side and put the issue out in front of you. Attack the issue and search for truth and wisdom; don't shoot arrows at each other.
- Final reminder:
  - This kind of loving relationship is impossible for us to do just by trying harder...
  - To get an apple tree to produce more and healthier apples, we don't simply try to make it a better-looking apple tree. We make sure it is rooted in the kind of moist, nutritious soil from which it can draw life into its limbs resulting in healthy fruit.
  - We don't become a healthy family by simply working harder at becoming a healthy family
    - We cannot look at Paul's words to us today as simply a self-help guide

- We become a healthy family by being deeply rooted in the Word; we become a healthy family by being increasingly wholehearted followers of Jesus; by loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and by relying of the power of the Spirit of God who lives in each one of us!
  - From that place of worship, we turn to one another and love one another deeply, even though we may disagree on some things...
- This is our high calling. ***“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit”***