

Rev. Charlie Hot:

[01:00:05:13 - 01:00:28:09]

Let us pray, heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit working in our hearts and our lives, filling us and calling us to follow you and to give ourselves up for your service. We pray that the ministry and preaching of your word might be your word for the sake and glory of your Son, Jesus, in his name we pray, amen.

[01:00:29:21 - 01:00:30:17]

Please be seated.

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I learned something today that we have a spotlight that is like beaming down right there. You can see Jerry's right there.

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He's the only one that's being spotlighted right now, but if you want to have your sins burned out of you, that's where you sit, and the glory of God will shine down and just explode it out of you. It's really a great place. So, Jerry, you're gonna be very holy after today.

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We'll get it fixed, but so glad to see all of you. One of the things that happens in churches in general, and I wanna talk about it with you today, is there can be a bit of a culture that develops in the context of a congregation, and I wanna reflect with you on the culture that had developed in a church that the Apostle Paul had planted back in the day of the first apostles. It was the Church of Galatia,

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and what had developed in that culture was a bit of a culture war, actually,

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and the war was over those who were Jewish converts to the faith and those who were Gentile converts to the faith, and the culture war was manifesting in a lot of biting and devouring one another is the way that Paul puts it, and we're in chapter five of Paul's letter to the Galatians. He says, "You were called to freedom, brothers, and sisters, "only don't use your freedom as an opportunity "for self-indulgence, but through love "become slaves to one another, "for the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

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"If, however, you bite and devour one another, "take care that you're not consumed by one another." Wow, that's pretty challenging language. What he's saying is, what I want our culture of our church to be like is one where we treat each other with love, first and foremost, that we treat each other with mutual respect, where we show the freedom of Christ to one another, and that we offer freedom and love and grace,

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but what I'm seeing in the context of the church is one of biting and devouring one another and attacking one another, and this can happen in any cultural context, by the way. It's very prevalent in our day, just in the general waters that we're all swimming in, isn't it? Where you have sort of the progressive side of the culture and the conservative side of the culture, and we're not talking very kindly about one another, are we?

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And on one side, there's this desire to sort of loosen boundaries and relax standards, and on the other side, a reassertion of boundaries and standards and laws,

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and the same dynamic plays itself out in human families and systems, in churches, and households, and in nations. It's a very common human dilemma, culture war.

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And so back then, this Jewish-Gentile dynamic, how would that have played itself out? Well, I'll use an illustration, something that happened to me, in my experience with Judaism. So when I was a seminary and I had to get a second job to help put myself through school, and so I started

to work for a Jewish actuary, and his office had about half Jewish people and half Gentiles. In a Jewish way of thinking about things, you have the Jewish people and then everybody else, and the category for everybody else is Gentile. It's the Hebrew word goyim, which basically means the nations. So we have our nation, and then we have all the other nations, the goyim. And so what my job was, was to be the head of the actuary firm's secretary,

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and he would buy lunch for everybody in the office. There was about 10 of us in the office, and so I had to go around each morning and take everybody's lunch order, and he got to pick where we went, of course, because he was the boss and he was paying for it. But I would take everybody's order, and then I'd go, and one of the places that he loved to go was a Jewish deli, and this was in Chicago, and so I would go, and I would give the orders, and every time I would give an order, I would be judged.

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I would say things like lettuce and tomato on corned beef, and somebody would be standing next to me and go, lettuce and tomato on corned beef? Ew, that must be for a Gentile.

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And so I'd come back and I'd tell the stories of how I had been judged by my sandwich orders at the deli and one of the Gentile members of the office, he thought it was hilarious, so he tried to order more and more offensive sandwiches,

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and then I would get sent to go and give the orders. So he came up with this sandwich that was, I can't remember all the stuff on it, but I know it had like meat and coleslaw and Thousand Island dressing and all of this. It sounded pretty good to me, but I started making the order, and the guy behind the counter, he goes, "Did a jerk order this sandwich?"

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Only a jerk would order a sandwich like this, and this is part of the culture in Chicago, is not only you had the Jewish Gentile thing, but you also had the Chicago New York thing, and I didn't know this, but I was actually ordering a sandwich called a New Yorker.

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And so the guy says, "Well, we don't have any coleslaw here," and so he goes in the back, and he's like, "And we don't have any Thousand Island dressing, "and I'm just gonna put ketchup on it. "These New Yorkers are too dumb to know the difference."

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And so this was my experience of being,

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in a sense, judged because of food,

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and what it is is the Jewish culture has really put some serious markers and boundaries over Jewish identity, and that's actually what has preserved the Jewish people for millennia, actually, that they have very strict rules and laws that really come right out of the Old Testament about ways to eat, ways to carry themselves, and some of the things are moral standards and moral laws and purity, but some of them are just to set apart Jews and Gentiles. So here's Paul, and he's trying to create a congregation that's based out of Jesus, first and foremost, and that brings together both Jewish people, Jewish converts and Gentile converts, and have them living together and being in community together with one another.

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And the tensions were very severe.

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We're sort of working out the expectations for community standards. One of the big ones was, are we going to expect all of these Gentile converts to undergo the Jewish right of circumcision?

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Do we expect them to follow all the dietary customs that we Jewish people have been following? I mean, after all, isn't this the Jewish Messiah, not the Gentile Messiah?

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And so what Paul was doing, and it had really boiled over in the sense of people were attacking one another with their words. This is the biting and devouring thing. Well, they're not following the rules the right way. They're not doing, oh, you okay?

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Okay, good.

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Got lights and things falling. (Audience Laughing) But they were attacking one another, and this is not the way church is supposed to be. And we had little culture wars over the difference between traditional music and contemporary music back at my church in Lake Mary, where we wanted to install some screens to put the music up on the screen. And I had one of my parishioners condemn the whole enterprise and said, "Screams behind the altar "were an abomination to the Lord." And she really came down hard on all of the people that wanted to worship the Lord, same Jesus, but just do it with a different personality and a different type of music. And I realized culture wars are very serious when they break out in the life of a church. And so what Paul is saying is we need to breathe grace on one another. We need to give each other a freedom

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and make the highest value that we have in our relationships with one another love. The second of the two great commandments, the first one being, "Love the Lord your God "with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength." And the second is, "Like unto it," right? Know it? Love your neighbor as yourself.

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On these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets is what we as good Episcopalians have learned.

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And so what Paul is doing is elevating the higher values of love over the culture battles in the context of this church in Galatia. And I think we have a lot of good lessons that we can take from this.

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And one of the problems with the Gentile converts, and Paul's very open and honest about this,

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is that Gentile converts are actually coming into the life of the church, and their lives have not been fully sanctified by God. They haven't been living under the Old Testament commandments and laws.

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And so they come into the life of the church and they bring with themselves a lot of fleshly problems.

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And one of the impulses of the Jewish converts was to lay down the law on these Gentile converts.

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And Paul's teaching is that's not the antidote to the flesh.

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Law is not the antidote to the flesh.

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We had a couple that I invited to church,

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and this is again in Lake Mary. I'm not talking about y'all, talking about other people.

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But I invited this couple to church and they had not been going to church and yet they expressed to me that they wanted to come to church. And so I invited them to church and they did not come pre-sanctified and holy, like a Baptist becoming an Episcopalian or a Methodist becoming Episcopalian, which we're always grateful to get the pre-sanctified ones. They know how to tithe, they know how to volunteer for things, they've generally got their morals right. We're always pretty grateful for the sheep switching. That's good.

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But this couple came to church and I didn't see it, but his hand kind of like went down on, a little lower than her waist as they were sitting in the pew.

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And one of our members was longtime members sitting right behind, slapped his hand.

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Do that kind of thing in church.

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Right.

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And you know what?

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They had a hard time with that.

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First time that they visited

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and one of our members sort of laid down the law on them, like that.

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This is what Paul is getting at is that we have to give room for each other. We need to breathe grace on one another, provide some freedom to one another, but there is an important aspect of culture that we need to pay attention to. And where Paul puts the culture war within the context of the church is actually a war that happens internally within each and every one of our hearts.

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That we have to wrestle with what he describes as the flesh.

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And the true culture war, the true battle that should take place in this congregation and the one in Galatia and the one that I served in Lake Mary, but the true culture war is the war between the flesh and the Holy Spirit.

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And what Paul says is these two things are at odds with each other. They're mutually exclusive. You can't be walking in the flesh and at the same time be walking in the spirit.

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And so they're contrary to each other. They're going different directions. They have different goals for your life.

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And he makes a little list here. So we remember what the works of the flesh, listen the way he puts it. I say, "Live by the spirit. "Don't gratify the desires of the flesh. "For what the flesh desires is opposed to the spirit, "what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, "these are opposed to each other "to prevent you from doing what you want." You have this battle going on inside of you. But if you're led by the spirit, you're not subject to the law. The works of the flesh are obvious. And he lists them off. Fornication, which is sex outside of marriage. Impurity, licentiousness.

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Some people, when they hear freedom, they hear, "Woo-hoo, take off all the reins." That's licentiousness. Idolatry, sorcery,

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emenities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

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I'm warning you, as I warned those before, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, the works of the flesh are the wrong direction. And if we see these kinds of works manifesting themselves in our lives, they are contrary to the work of the Holy Spirit of God. They're not of God. They're not of the kingdom of God. And they need to be renounced. And in the words of Paul a little bit later in this passage, crucified. These are the aspects of ourselves that need to die.

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And it's not to say that, you know, I look at that list and I can find myself in much of that list. You know, I haven't done all of the things in that list. I've pretty much avoided carousing.

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But at one point in my life or another,

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I have broken things in that list.

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And I think if we're honest, we can all find ourselves there. And what legalism is trying to do is to control that,

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control the works of the flesh with a bunch of rules and laws. But the problem is it doesn't cure it.

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It's kind of like, you know, mowing the grass. You're not digging up the roots. You're just trimming the surface.

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And yes, you can get conformity through the law. You can get compliance.

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But what Paul is saying is I want a church that manifests a culture of conversion

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where we don't just deal with the surface and put band-aids on the wounds, but we actually heal the source and the heart of the problem.

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And so what that involves is not the law and the rules,

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but what that involves is a conversion of the heart through the indwelling empowering of the Holy Spirit of God.

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And so he says, "By contrast to the flesh,

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"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, "patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, "gentleness, and self-control."

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There's no law against such things. And you can't legislate those things into existence, actually.

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They come from an internal conversion of the heart.

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Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, but if we live by the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit.

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I had a same church I was talking about where the guy's hand got slapped.

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We had a motto that we used to say at that congregation was share the joy, which was part of a larger mission statement for the church. Share the joy and love of Jesus Christ through worship, discipleship, ministry, fellowship,

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mission, something like that. And what I always used to teach the congregation was

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joy and love are really like core values of the congregation.

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They're the first two on the list of the fruit of the Spirit, and if you get those two, they all start to fall after that. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We all should have these things memorized and be looking for this type of fruit to manifest in the context of our hearts, our lives, our families, our households, and in the relationships within the church.

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And the way they work is a lot like tell tales on a sailboat. So how many sailors do we have in here? Anybody, just a handful. Well, on a sailboat, you always set your course and you're trying to get to a certain place and you have to adjust your sails in order to go there.

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And so on a sail, there are these ribbons that are at the top of the sail and they are tells.

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And if your sail is not set correctly, they flap in the wind, or they may stick up straight or they go down, but you know that your sail is set correctly when that little ribbon is just shooting straight back.

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And it just sits there and it's the most beautiful thing. And it makes it easy that if you can look at those tells, you know you're set correctly.

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Well, the fruit of the Spirit are like tells in our life and the works of the flesh work the same way. You start to see the works of the flesh rearing their ugly head, the biting, the devouring one another, the factions, the drunkenness, whatever it is, the carousing.

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You start to see these things happening

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in your life, in the culture, in your context of whatever it is, you know that the works of the flesh are operating.

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You start to see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Well then the tell is set correctly. You see that ribbon just flying back straight. And you know your sails are set right and you're going in the right direction as a church, as a people, as a culture.

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And so, are you feeling love? Are you feeling the joy in the relationships?

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It's a good question.

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And it's not to say that we don't always feel it. I mean I've had vestry meetings and committee meetings and interactions with people and I'm like, I'm not feeling the love and joy in this room right now.

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But when that happens, it's a tell.

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And somebody needs to have the emotional maturity and the spiritual maturity to maybe raise their hand or say, time out.

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I don't feel good about the way the dynamics going right now.

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And what I would love for us to do is just to reflect on where we need to be moving in our relationships because I know that what we're supposed to be about is experiencing the joy and the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts and I'm not feeling it right now.

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And that's a really mature thing to do, is to pay attention to the culture of your church, your household, your family. I mean this works everywhere.

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And allow the spirit of the living God to have the breathing room and the freedom to blossom

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within your heart and in your lives and in your relationships and bear the kind of fruit that God wants to see in the life of his people.

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