

GALATIANS - SERMON 24

GALATIANS 5:13-15 — THE REMEDY AGAINST ABUSE IN THE CHURCH
Pastor Max Doner, Sovereign Grace Bible Church Lebanon, Oregon
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INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:13-15

Bad doctrine always produces bad practice in the Christian religion.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

What do wholesome words produce? They *accord with godliness*.

What is to be incorporated into the concept of *wholesome words*? The answer is *even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That man who teaches *otherwise* is (by the Spirit of God directing the pen of Paul) *proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth*.

And according to this manuscript what is the counsel of God regarding the people of God in light of such a teacher? *From such withdraw yourself.*

In Galatians 5:15 Paul supplies a description of what was taking place within the Galatians churches (*if* of description rather than an *if* of supposition). They were *biting and devouring one another*. In another place they are charged with provoking and envying one another.

Any teaching which promotes human works as the basis of acceptance with God also promotes human pride.

Proverbs 13:10

By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Pride is at the foundation of much of the strife within the church and the teaching of acceptance upon the basis of human works promotes such pride. This was one of the fruits of the Judaizing teachers.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul seeks to correct this error by promoting the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This doctrine will rob a man of any foundation for pride.

OUTLINE:

- I THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH UNITY AS DESCRIBED IN THE SCRIPTURES.
- II THE WARNING AGAINST THE ABUSE OF OUR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN, v 15.
- III THE REMEDY FOR THE ABUSE OF OUR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN.

CONCLUSION:

I THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH UNITY AS DESCRIBED IN THE SCRIPTURES.

Envy and strife is the fruit of those whose father is the devil. But the children of God, if they are true children of God, should have envy and strife far from them. To find envy and strife among the people of the world is no marvel, but to find it among the people of God is intolerable in the highest degree. Envy and strife destroys the church by causing dissension, division, discontent, and often departure.

Not only does strife and envy destroy the church itself, it also destroys the testimony of the church in the sight of the world.

The unity of the church was of great importance to Paul.

Romans 12:10, 16-18

*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;
... Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

1 Corinthians 1:10

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 2:1-3

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Galatians 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

To five different churches Paul has counseled the importance of unity among the brethren in the churches. Church unity is an important goal in the church.

Disunity has been a chronic problem the churches of God from the beginning. It is imperative that churches address it, strive after unity, and conquer those problems that disrupt it.

II THE WARNING AGAINST THE ABUSE OF OUR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN, V 15.

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

The metaphor used here is that of animals. It is not a flattering picture of Christians. The Christian church can be ruined by her own members.

Matthew 12:25

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

Of what does this *biting and devouring* consist? More information is supplied in this chapter regarding the nature of biting and devouring.

Galatians 5:20-21

... idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In this list of sins Paul addresses sexual sins (verse 19), religious sins (*idolatry* and *sorcery*), and then inter-personal sins (*envy* . . .). This last category is composed of those sins which we commit against other people. This can be used as descriptive of what it means to *bite and devour one another*.

The list includes *hatred* which is related to murder, the ultimate sin against another person.

Contentions are next on the list. This is a person who simply loves to argue and oppose those around him.

Jealousies come next which have their root in the fear that one person will gain something from us. It is motivated by a fear that someone will get from us what we have.

Outbursts of wrath - a passionate indignation against others that boils over into aggressive behavior against one another. The picture here is of someone who boils up and then boils over.

Selfish ambitions (strife) - the need to have one's own way regardless of method.

Dissensions are the creation of divisions and parties within the church. This fosters an 'us against them' mentality. This kind of person works to divide people.

Heresies - involve the building up of a following around a false doctrine, practice, or person. This creates serious divisions.

Envy - this is the displeasure that arises from seeing someone having what we do not have. It differs from *jealousy* which is a fear of losing what we have to another.

Envy is an unsettled spirit because someone else has what we want. Envy and jealousy are the opposite sides of the same coin.

These things vividly describe what Paul means by *biting and devouring one another* within the church. In order to stop this divisive behavior the characteristics listed as fruits of the Spirit are proffered in verse 22 and following. These things will promote unity among the brethren.

III THE REMEDY FOR THE ABUSE OF OUR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN.

What is the antidote and opposite of *biting and devouring one another*? It the healing and restoration of one another and the pursuit of those things which promote peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

One's *calling* is one's vocation. To *walk worthy of one's calling* is to pursue one's vocation rightly. A portion of our calling as Christians is to pursue peace. The pursuit of peace and unity is achieved by *lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love*. Thereby we shall endeavor to keep *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.

- A The Biblical prescription is *lowliness*. That person who has an appropriately low esteem of himself is one who is conscious of his own sinfulness and weakness. This results in a disposition to go unnoticed and un-praised. This kind of person is going to be one who does not bite and devour others at all. He will be a person who builds others up. What does it mean to be *lowly*? This is contrary of the contemporary self-esteem movement, but such is the biblical prescription for the people of God. We must not have a high estimate of ourselves. By cultivating a properly low estimate of oneself will produce a forbearance for others.
- B We should also have *meekness (gentleness)*. What is meekness? It is an unresisting and uncomplaining disposition of mind which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of other persons. A meek person is one who gives in and yields in a good sense. This person is not a fighter where divine doctrinal principles are not at stake. This person does not strive to get his way. This person will suffer a wrong rather than cause a scene about it. Love covers a multitude of sin.
- C We should also exemplify *longsuffering*. This is a disposition to suppress the temper when provoked by another and to defer the expression of anger and the desire for punishment. A person who is longsuffering is one for whom it takes a long time for his temper is provoked. Patience is to be employed where things provocative come into a relationship. There is room for waiting for someone to change rather than lashing out against them.
- D The fourth necessary attribute or characteristic is *forbearance (bearing with one another)*. To forbear means to put up with another person patiently and without resentment, in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, knowing that we all have a long way to go, and that many have had to forbear with us. It is one thing to be patient

with someone and another thing to be patient with a good attitude. Forbearance is not patience with a clinched jaw. Forbearance is patience with a smile.

Can we not see that by adopting and incorporating these four characteristics true biblical unity will be preserved in the bond of peace. If the church was full of such people, would it not be a peaceful and loving fellowship?

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Conclusion:

The only way to come to this kind of character is by the route of sound doctrine or theology. There is a theological basis underlying each one of those characteristics. It was false doctrine in the churches of Galatia that had resulted in this biting and devouring spirit among them. For a church to deny the significance of sound instruction or to distance itself from doctrinal preaching ‘for the sake of unity’ is to pursue disaster. It is to do the opposite of what is biblical. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation would truly prove to be a most humbling and beneficial foundation for such a church as Paul is encouraging.

Hymn # 627