

If You Bite and Devour
Galatians 5:15-18
April 24th, 2022

1. A _____ about biting and devouring one another (5:15)
 - a. We bite and devour when our interactions are characterized by the deeds of the _____ not the fruit of the _____. (Gal. 5:19-23)
 - b. We bite and devour by _____ and _____. (2 Cor. 12:20; Pr. 16:28; 17:9)
 - c. We bite and devour by unrelenting _____. (James 5:9)
 - d. We bite and devour when we judge one another on issues of _____. (Rom. 14:2-5)
2. A _____ and a _____ about walking by the Spirit (5:16-18)

Questions for Application/Reflection on Galatians 5:15-18

1. If most New Testament letters written to churches include warnings and instruction about conflict and unity, what does that tell us to expect in local churches today?
2. Have you been on the receiving end of “biting and devouring” in a church? What was that like?
3. How does it change the way you view this section on the deeds of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit if you see it in the context of how we treat one another? (note the repeated warnings in v. 15 and v. 26 that bracket the section)
4. What are some wise and gracious ways to respond if you feel like you are getting pulled in to gossip or slander?
5. How does a church maintain an open culture of feedback and ideas without cultivating an overly critical dynamic? How does the church in Acts 6:1-7 provide a good model? What problem arose? How did they solve it? What was the result?
6. Read Romans 14:1-15:7 (or 14:1-6 for a smaller portion). What are some common ways Christians bite and devour one another on issues of conscience? How can we build and maintain a church culture that shows grace on issues of conscience?

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Big idea: Churches can destroy themselves from within by their treatment of one another.

Intro

Jesus promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The “Church” with a capital “C” will endure until God’s plans are accomplished. But local churches with a lower case “c” close every week. They fracture, dissolve, disappear, and pull themselves apart. How do they do it? What leads to the destruction of churches? There is no simplistic answer, no one answer, but there are a few common answers that scripture warns about and experience has shown.

Doctrinal drift

Ungodly leadership – qualifications in Titus 1 and 1 Tim 3; rebuked in 1 Tim 5/6, not lording their authority in 1 Pet 5

Overly internally focused rather than appropriately balancing internal healthy dynamics of church life with an external heart for those who don’t yet know Christ

But one of the most repeated warnings has to do with internal conflict and strife.

First four chapters of 1 Corinthians on unity amidst divisions

1 Corinthians 1:10-11 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

Romans 12 – unity with diversity of gifts rather than pride, fervent in love for one another

Romans 12:10 *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?

Romans 15:7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Ephesians – 3 chapters on the gospel and then “preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”

Ephesians 4:2-3 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians – One of the most positive and joy filled NT books with few stern corrections, but it does include two women by name who are in conflict.

Philippians 4:2-3a I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. ³ Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel,

These were partners in the gospel, fellow servants

Colossians –

Colossians 3:14-15 Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

1 Peter – Amid persecution and suffering ...

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

1 Peter 3:8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

1 Peter 4:7-9 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Notice it doesn't say ... the end of all things is near, therefore build a bigger bunker and stock it with food and be ready to isolate yourselves and protect your own...but be of sound judgment, pray, above all keep fervent in your love for one another. "Keep fervent" implies that it takes intentional energy to keep that stoked.

For Galatians, we'll find similar warnings in the middle of chapter 5. It uses visual language to warn against biting and devouring one another.

We'll look at this in two parts that will flow into a longer section on the fruit of the Spirit.

It contains a warning, a command, and a promise. We'll look at the warning for most of our time together and then briefly introduce the command and promise.

Why are we talking about this today? Is it because there is a major crisis of complaining?

It's just the next passage.

However, in God's providence its helpful to come to it now because times of growth can easily be times of conflict.

The church in Acts experienced this in Acts 6 when a growing body of believers lead to conflict.

Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

Long time members can feel overlooked or pushed out of key roles.

New people can miss aspects of their former churches that they don't see here in the same way.

Change and adaptation can feel too rapid for some while too slow for others.

1. A **warning** about biting and devouring one another (5:15)

Bite and devour refer to animals attacking one another

The poet Tennyson has a famous line where he refers to "Nature, red in tooth and claw" to describe the natural world.

The natural world is bloody and brutal as carnivores tear apart other animals. Nature documentaries either show them as the majestic hunter or the horrible villain, depending on whether it is a documentary about lions or wildebeests.

Neglecting gospel-doctrine or gospel-culture

The book has been a robust defense of the gospel of grace.

The content of the gospel must be clear.

But we have also seen an emphasis on the application of the gospel to relationships in the church.

Gal. 2:12ff this was addressed when Peter was holding himself aloof from the Gentile Christians.

- a. We bite and devour other Christians when our interactions with them are characterized by the deeds of the **flesh** not the fruit of the **Spirit**. (Gal. 5:19-23)

- i. Inclusio
 - 1. Bite and devour (v. 15)
 - a. Walk by the Spirit (v. 16)
 - b. Walk by the Spirit (v. 25)
 - 2. Boastful/challenging/envying (v. 26)
 - ii. It will take more than one message to get through this rich passage on the deeds of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit.
 - iii. But I want you to notice the relational nature of so many of these words.
 - iv. The deeds of the flesh can be put in 4 categories:
 - 1. Sexual – immorality, impurity, sensuality
 - 2. Spiritual – idolatry, sorcery
 - 3. Relational – enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying
 - 4. Excess – drunkenness, carousing
 - v. The list isn't exhaustive as it mentions "things like these."
 - vi. The list isn't in order of priority or seriousness. It is broad. But I can't help but notice that the largest category is relational.
 - 1. These are ways we could bite and devour one another when they are patterns/practices, which is the warning about the deeds of the flesh. When they are practices that characterize someone it's an indication they may not be saved.
- b. We bite and devour by ***gossip*** and ***slander***. (2 Cor. 12:20; Pr. 16:28; 17:9)
- i. (From Strauch) D. E. Hoste, the successor to Hudson Taylor who founded the China Inland Mission, was a student of human behavior. An extraordinarily skilled people manager, Hoste was responsible for more than a thousand missionaries across China. Reflecting on one of the most troubling problems the mission had faced in China, he wrote:
 - 1. Looking back over these fifty years, I really think that if I were asked to mention one thing which has done more harm and occasioned more sorrow and division in God's work than anything else, I should say tale-bearing. Gossip, or talebearing, is one of the common sins of discord. It is a work of the flesh (2 Cor. 12:20). Like a dreadful, contagious disease, it poisons people's minds and creates chaos and misinformation. It is an ugly vice that drives people apart and destroys peace.
 - 2. Proverbs condemns it as a malicious act that "separates close friends" (Prov. 16:28; 17:9). It can do great damage to the believing community, particularly when conflict arises.
 - 3. One of the fastest ways to stop gossip and the division it creates is to not repeat it: "For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases" (Prov. 26:20).
- c. We bite and devour by unrelenting ***criticism***. (James 5:9)
- i. **James 5:9** Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.
 - ii. **1 Peter 4:9** Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

1. “Complaint” is a great word here. It the word “goggusmos” meaning murmuring. But it’s a word that sounds like what it is. *Goggusmos* sounds like muttering, and that’s what it’s forbidding.
 2. It’s a similar idea as Number 14 where the people complain about the food in the wilderness and then complain that the food isn’t what they want – sounds like dinner at home with little kids.
- iii. But we also don’t want a church where ANY criticism is considered excessive criticism. That isn’t healthy either. Leadership can’t be beyond criticism and feedback. That is a ditch that a church can fall into.
1. Leadership that is unable to be criticized is totalitarianism in church form. That is Lording leadership.
 2. Some criticism is just par for the course and will be natural when people are passionate about things.
1. **Proverbs 9:8b-9** Reprove a wise man and he will love you. ⁹ Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning.
- iv. Ask – is my criticism relentless? Balanced? Fair? Informed? Is it driven by preference or principle? Can well-intentioned, mature believers see this differently? Is it a difference of principle or strategy? (i.e. we should all want to meet the needs of the poor – is it best to do that through personal care, partnering with other like-minded churches, supporting government agencies, providing employment or job skills)
- v. Our chickens are a good analogy for this. We have had backyard chickens for a few years. One of the things we’ve had to watch for is when the chickens sense a weakness in one of the birds, they will relentlessly peck at it. A small sore can become a gaping wound. A small patch without feathers grows as they peck out more. Eventually they will kill a wounded bird.
1. That is biting and devouring in the animal kingdom!
 2. But people in churches can do that. They see a weakness in someone or see someone struggling, and instead of providing care, support, encouragement, patience, they peck at their weakness.
- vi. But unrelenting criticism that fails to show patience, give the benefit of the doubt, or consider the bigger picture can be really harmful.
- d. We bite and devour when we judge one another on issues of ***conscience***. (Rom. 14:2-5)
- i. There are many issues in which well-intentioned, growing Christians may legitimately differ. Not talking about clear and fundamental moral issues in which scripture is crystal clear – lying, stealing, sexual immorality. Rather issues with a layer of interpretation or application that Christians might come to different conclusions.
 1. Should we work on Sundays?
 2. Is any amount of alcohol acceptable to drink?
 3. How expressive should we be during worship?
 4. How should we school our children?
 5. What type of clothing crossing the line into immodesty?
 6. Should Christians celebrate Christmas or hand out candy at Halloween?

- ii. You might have strong convictions on many of these issues, and that's ok. You may disagree with Christians who arrive at different conclusions, and that's also ok. What's not ok is biting and devouring one another over differences rather than assuming the best, having conversations, not reading into motives.
2. A **command** and a **promise** about walking by the Spirit (5:16-18)
- a. The command is to walk by the Spirit.
 - i. 4 terms – roughly equivalent – walk in the Spirit (v. 16), to be led by the Spirit (v. 18), to live by the Spirit (v. 25a), to keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25b)
 - ii. Walking by the Spirit requires an active, step-by-step, daily effort to live the Christian life by means of the presence and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing but the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to enable believers to resist the desires of the flesh and to live the Christlike life.
 - 1. Humble submission/Conscious dependence on the Spirit
 - b. Promise/result is that we won't carry out the desire of the flesh.
 - i. "Flesh" here has the idea of the sinful desires that remain in a believer even after they have been saved and given the Spirit.
 - ii. It's not talking about our physical body as opposed to our spirit. We know this because many of the "deeds of the flesh" listed below are internal not external.
 - iii. Rather it's that aspect of our hearts or desires that have not yet been renewed by the Spirit and continue to compete against the desires of the Holy Spirit within us.
 - iv. We therefore experience these competing desires that are in opposition to one another.
 - v. We'll develop this in coming weeks, but for now I just want you to notice that this is sandwiched between warnings about how we treat each other in the church.
 - 1. Biting and devouring (v. 15) and challenging/envying one another (v. 26), bearing one another's burdens (6:2)



1

1 Corinthians 1:10-11 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

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Romans 12:10 *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?

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Romans 15:7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

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Ephesians 4:2-3 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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Philippians 4:2-3a I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.³ Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of the gospel*,

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Colossians 3:14-15 Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

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1 Peter 3:8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

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1 Peter 4:7-9 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

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10

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a. We bite and devour when our interactions are characterized by the deeds of the *flesh* not the fruit of the *Spirit*. (Gal. 5:19-23)

12

b. We bite and devour
by *gossip* and *slander*.

(2 Cor. 12:20; Pr. 16:28;
17:9)

13

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

14

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

15

Proverbs 17:9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

16

c. We bite and devour by
unrelenting *criticism*.
(James 5:9)

17

James 5:9 Do not complain,
brethren, against one
another, so that you
yourselves may not be
judged; behold, the Judge is
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2. A *command* and a
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22