

**Galatians 5: 15 and 16; “Biting and Devouring One Another”, # 37 in the series –  
“Christ has Set us Free”, a Bible Study conducted on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015,  
by Pastor Paul Rendall at his home.**

We have seen in our previous study that all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And now, here in verse 15 we find the contrary being spoken of by the Apostle Paul: “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.” Our study this evening will be focusing on this warning which Paul gives to the believers in the churches of Galatia. Is it really possible that Christians can bite and devour one another? We see from these verses that it is not only possible, but that it does really happen, because Paul is not issuing this warning to them so that they would just beware of wicked men who were false teachers. He has already done that many times in this letter. Rather he is issuing this warning to the Christians themselves, who had not yet learned that there is a fleshly way to engage disagreements over doctrine, and there is a spiritual way to engage in disagreements over doctrine. It appears that in these churches, that they were in danger of being consumed by one another in the way that they were interacting with one another over what was true and false in relation to the gospel. We want to look 1<sup>st</sup> of all at the problem; that of Christians biting and devouring one another. And then 2<sup>nd</sup> – We will look at the remedy for this problem which is given to us in verse 16 – Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The problem; that of Christians biting and devouring one another.**

The picture given to us here in metaphorical language is that of real people acting like animals; people who bite each other, or who act like animals who bite people. There are three sorts of creatures which are mentioned in the Bible as biting and devouring people. They are dogs and snakes and lions. Let us turn to a few verses here. First a literal situation of biting and devouring which is found in the Bible. Turn with me over to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 9, and we will look at verses 30-37. “Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window.” “Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, ‘Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?’” “And he looked up at the window, and said, ‘Who is on my side?’” “Who?” “So two or three eunuchs looked out at him.” “Then he said, ‘Throw her down.’” “So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot.” “And when he had gone in, he ate and drank.” “Then he said, ‘Go now see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a kings’ daughter.’” “So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.” “Therefore they came back and told him.” “And he said, ‘This is the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, ‘Here lies Jezebel.’”

We see here how it was the Lord’s judgment upon this wicked woman, that she would be torn to pieces and eaten and devoured by dogs; a very horrible death indeed! God is saying to us in this passage that people who do not repent of their sins against Him, eventually a day will come when God will tear them in pieces. We should understand that this is righteous with God. Psalm 50, verses 16-23: “But to the wicked God say: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?’” “When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers.” “You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.” “You sit and speak against your brother; you slander you own mother’s son.” “These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in

order before your eyes.” “Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.” You see, God is acting righteously when He judges the wicked, those who forget Him and will not repent of their sins. But to those who will praise Him for the gift of salvation in Christ and set their life in order, He will show them the salvation of God. A Christian, if they are wise will love to be instructed on how they should react to thing that they do not agree with. They will want to be wise in all their behavior. Proverbs 1: 5-7 – “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.” “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

But as we look at other portions of the Bible, we find that men of the world will sometimes act as dogs, or serpents or hungry lions. Turn with me over Psalm 58, verses 1-7. “Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones?” “Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?” “No, in heart you work wickedness; you weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth.” “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” “Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear, which will not heed the voice of charmers, charming ever so skillfully.” “Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!” “Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord.” “Let them flow away as waters which run continually; when he bends his bow, let his arrows be as if cut in pieces.” Now you can see here that both the serpent and the young lions are being compared here to wicked unbelieving people in their sins. Their heart is full of the poison of sin, and they will not hear the voice of the charmers, charming ever so skillfully. In other words, the charmers are those who try to speak to them, to turn them away from their sins. I think that we could even go so far as to say that the charmers are those who would attempt to preach to them the gospel of Christ. But these people who act as serpents and lions do not want to hear it. Listen to John Gill on the charmers: “Such Gospel ministers are, who are mighty in the Scriptures. The voice of the Gospel is a charming voice; it publishes good news and glad tidings; it is a voice of love, grace, and mercy, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and is wisely charmed when it gives no uncertain sound, is all of a piece, and is faithfully preached, as it was by the apostles of Christ; who, as wise men, laid him as the foundation of eternal life and salvation; and especially as it was preached by Christ himself, who spake as never man did: and yet, such were the hardness and obstinacy of the wicked Jews, that they stopped their ears to his ministry, nor would they suffer others to attend upon it; and so it is now: which shows the insufficiency of the best means of themselves, and the necessity of powerful and efficacious grace, to work upon the hearts of men.” So you see, it is the false wisdom of the flesh which rejects instruction from the gospel and the word of God. And we must beware of men who promote it. These men will bite and devour.

Turn with me over to Philippians chapter 3, verse 1. We will look at verses 1-7. “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” “For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.” “Beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh.” “If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” Here is the very problem which leads Christians to bite and devour one another. This “confidence in the flesh” is the fleshly thinking and reasoning of how God is to be known, worshiped, and served. A person who is like this thinks that their own thoughts about

religion, before they ever read the Bible, are the best thoughts. These kind of people will define for themselves what they think true religion is. In Paul's case, it was his holding to Judaism without Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law. Before his conversion to Christ, Paul thought that it was the fact that he was a Jew outwardly that brought him into favor with God. And the fact that he was zealous for promoting the righteousness of the law, and persecuted those who had faith in Christ, this was his highest pursuit and his greatest goal. But now that he had come to saving faith in Christ, he knew that he must put away this fleshly mindset; that he was somehow justified in his zealously contending against those who were trusting in Christ. He would put his trust in Christ alone, rather than in himself and his own ceremonial and moral righteousness, in order to be approved by God. He would put away the unloving spirit of self-righteous pride. I want you to notice that the Apostle Paul uses the same word here which he uses in our text; He uses the word "beware". You must beware of this false zeal; a zeal that is desirous to hurt Christians because they have told you the truth. You now realize that without Christ, and without love, you are nothing. A Christian places no confidence in the flesh. They do not place their confidence in their own works and religious privileges as being the basis of their confidence toward God or men. Rather, all of these things Paul came to consider, and to re-think, and he counted them as loss in relation to having Christ.

The problem of our text goes further than this, however. I want to show you that sometimes this fleshly mindset of self-justification can creep into even the Christian's heart and life. This biting and devouring is also how a Christian person can sometimes act if they are walking in the flesh. To walk in the flesh, in this context of the verses that we are studying, of biting and devouring one another, is to think of things and do things only from the standpoint of your own selfish interests rather than attempting to learn what Christ and the Bible are telling you that you should be learning, which is the way of humility and self-denying obedience to God. It is how you feel and think and act when you believe that another Christian is doing something wrong, or when they are attempting to argue with you over some truth of the Word of God. When you think that you know the truth, you think that they should be teachable and consider the truth of the Bible. But they think that they know the Bible just as well as you do. There is a temptation at that point to think wrongly of them and to act badly toward them yourself.

You are tempted not to be patient with them, and you may fall to arguing with them yourself. When you are walking in the flesh, as a Christian, you aren't necessarily thinking of what Christ would have you do; only what will get rid of the problem as you see it. So if someone bites you, you bite them back. If someone speaks evil of you, you speak evil of them. If someone starts an argument over doctrine, you join in, in a spirit of antagonism, as if your fellow Christian is your enemy. If you see that a fellow Christian is sinning against you in some way, you may fall into thinking that you should retaliate against them in some way. That is the flesh, rendering evil for evil. Christians who act as dogs which bark and bite are really capable of doing many hurtful things to each other. They may exhibit aggression and anger and use sharp words with each other. A person like this, who is a Christian, or who says they are a Christian, will get "in your face" and tell you where you are wrong and just what they think of you, even though you know that you are holding to the truth of God's word. They may even speak against you to your face, or even behind your back. They may try to hurt you with their words and sometimes even with their actions. And you find yourself being tempted to do the same. That is biting and devouring of one another. Now, having described this problem, we will look at the remedy for this problem.

**It is, 2<sup>ndly</sup> - Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

That is the simple remedy, and I will open this truth up to you more in the next study, but suffice it to say, you and I as Christians need to realize that the only way that we can contend righteously for the truth which was once for all delivered to the saints, is by praying to the Lord

for grace and wisdom to come to our hearts and minds from the blessed Holy Spirit himself when we are speaking and interacting with other Christians about all the subjects related to the gospel and the truth of the Word of God. Being a Christian is not an intellectual game of who is the smartest in knowledge. It is a walk with Christ, praying to be able to communicate the truth in a wise and holy way; the way that the Spirit Himself teaches us. To walk in the Spirit is to remember on a continual and on-going basis, your need for Christ to teach you by His Spirit, and learning how to keep the commandments of God to the glory of God. The commandments of God are not kept by a rote formal obedience, but by a lively faith in the risen, living Christ. Look over at John 16: 13 – “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” “All things that the Father has are Mine.” “Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” Although these words are spoken directly to the Apostles, we should understand that the principle of the Spirit’s leading and teaching us is applicable to all believers. We do not receive revelatory truth as the Apostles did, but we are led into all the truth of the Scriptures by His guidance none the less.

How do we keep from biting and devouring one another? It is by praying and asking for the Lord’s help. We will close with a couple more verses. Psalm 141, verses 4. “Lord, I cry out to You; make haste to me!” “Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.” “Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies.” “Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness.” “It shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.” This is not biting and devouring one another. This is walking in the Spirit when we pray to receive instruction from the Bible and through the Spirit’s giving us wisdom on how we are to live out the truth. We pray about how we are to interact with others over the truth of the gospel and the Word of God. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 8 and 9 – “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.”