Necessary Sins – Part 2

# Biting and Devouring Each Other

# (Galatians 5.13-15)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we are continuing with part two of our message series “Necessary Sins.” If you were with us last week, you’ll remember that we were talking about sin, but not those sins that most people would agree on, that are wrong across the board in most every situation and every culture. You know, sins like murder, rape, or stealing; but what we’ve been talking about are those sins that a lot of people aren’t quite so fast to condemn. Last week, we looked at grumbling and complaining, sins that are more acceptable, more necessary, sins that are just kind of part of life. And today we’re going to talk about another one of those sins that many people would say is a “Necessary Sin.” Today I want to talk to you about what the Bible calls “Biting and Devouring Each Other.” And basically, it’s a critical spirit, not the constructive feedback that we give because we care, or that we want to help somebody get better, but what I’m talking about is that biting, that hurtful, criticizing, nitpicking that so often goes on.

Now some of you are already thinking about the people that need to hear this. You know, maybe you’re already considering sending the link to your boss or you’re wishing that your spouse could hear this, but what I want to do is speak to the church, to each one of you personally, because this scripture was written to the church and not those outside of the church. And so, to begin I want to set the tone, and I want to consider a passage of Scripture, actually a very popular verse in the Bible, that the apostle Paul shared with the church. It’s found in Galatians chapter 5 and he said in verse 13,

“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another” (Galatians 5:13-15, New Living Translation).

The theme in this passage is love, and it’s a theme all through the Bible because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The Bible is actually an amazing love story containing over 700,000 words, written over the course of 1,600 years, by 40 different authors, in three different languages, all describing God’s love for us, and how that love is demonstrated through his Son Jesus Christ. As the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 5:

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

What that means in the truest and deepest sense, is that God’s love has been extended to you and I as Jesus came and gave himself in a very practical way on the cross; dying for our sins, and extending the grace, love, and mercy of God to us. Very literally, the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 5 at verse 5 that,

“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he’s given” (Romans 5:5).

And so, the love of God is given through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit to us, so that we can love God and we can love each other, because it’s God’s love that changes us. That’s what Paul is teaching here in Galatians chapter 5,

“You’ve been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13, New Living Translation).

## 1. Transforming Us

So, number one, God’s love transforms us. God’s love does things. God’s love frees those who’ve been enslaved to sin. God’s love makes rebels into sons and daughters. God’s love takes lost people and guides them home. God’s love takes hurting people and heals them. God’s love does things; and his love is poured into our hearts, he’s transforming us so that we become the conduit through which his love is shared. Therefore, verse 14 says,

“Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you’re always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another” (Galatians 5:14-15, New Living Translation).

He says, “Watch out, because you guys are ruining friendships, you’re splitting families, and you’re going to destroy the church. You’re going to take all the good things that God has done and you’re going to destroy them because you’re not loving each other. Your biting and devouring each other like a bunch of cannibals. You’re fighting, arguing, and feasting on your brothers and sisters in Christ, because so often we feel justified in criticizing them, in tearing them down, and often for the silliest things. You know, maybe the way they raise their kids, or the way they dress, what they post on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, what kind of car they’re driving, or maybe even where they went on their last vacation, because you know that they’re in debt and they can’t afford it. And so, Paul says, “Love your neighbor as yourself… be careful you don’t destroy one another.”

You see, it’s that biting and devouring, that critical spirit, that’s actually destroying the potential intimacy you could have in your marriage. It’s driving a wall between you and your children, or you and your friends, and its keeping you from being a witness for God because everybody knows that you’re always hurting those around you and you’re not loving them. If your words are always biting, you’re always harsh, and you’re always cutting into people, be careful of destroying one another.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs chapter 12,

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18).

In other words, some people make cutting remarks, they hurt and criticize, but others wisely speak with words that build up and don’t tear down. It’s the tongue of the wise that brings healing and so God tells us in Ephesians chapter 4,

“Don’t let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

And so, here’s what we need to understand, a single word of criticism can bite and pierce someone’s heart, sticking with them for years. But if we choose not to let any unwholesome talk, nothing biting or unhelpful come out of our mouths and instead to let our words build others up according to their needs. Those words of encouragement can build them up and inspire them to press on for decades. Proverbs chapter 18 tells us that,

“The tongue has the power of life and death…” (Proverbs 18:21).

Our words have power, and so I want you to reflect on this, to examine your heart, and determine what kind of person you want to be. You see, there’s really only two options. The Lord said it this way in Luke chapter 6,

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

## 2. Destroying One Another

And so, one option, one kind of person, is to be one who continually tears down, destroying one another. Honestly, this is where many of us find ourselves time and time again, because of our sin nature it’s just natural. We tend to look for what’s wrong before we find what’s right even if it’s right in front of our face. The Psalmist says it this way, “Your tongue plots destruction, it’s like a sharpened razor…” (Psalm 52:2). And it’s easy to do, it’s natural to tear down, but when we do we’re actually becoming a lot like the Pharisees. And to the Pharisees Jesus had some very strong words to say in John chapter 8,

He said, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

And so, the Pharisees were like their father the devil who was known as the deceiver, the devourer, the prince of darkness, and the father of lies. He was also called the accuser, the one who accuses the people before God day and night. And in the same way, many of us, especially those of us that are married, can take a relatively good, decent person and pick them apart before lunch. Sometimes we don’t even recognize that we’re doing it. You know, it’s like, “I don’t like the way you snore.” Or, “I don’t like the way you dress.” Or, “Don’t you think you’ve eaten enough calories today?”

The problem is, we’re not only acting like Pharisees, but we’re acting like the devil, and the reason is that a lot of times we’re full of pride, and we think we know what’s best. Others of us are so insecure that we tear down others to elevate ourselves. And then a third category is those who just don’t understand. I’ve found myself there before, criticizing something that I don’t know anything about, speaking without any thought. You know, it’s kind of like tearing down a young mother in the grocery store for not disciplining her two-year-old. Then when you have your own two-year-old in the grocery store you recognize that you really can’t negotiate with terrorists! But you don’t know that until you have your own. Then all of a sudden, it’s like, I give up, I surrender, take the candy bar, just shut up. It’s being in that place that we just don’t understand.

I wonder how many of you could honestly say that you’ve ever met a critical, judgmental and bitter person that you wanted to be like? You know, someone who every time you meet them were biting and devouring, tearing down, just being plain mean-spirited. Well, I know that I never have, nor do I want to eat of its fruit, but the Bible says, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

This morning I want you to reflect on this, to examine your heart, and determine what kind of person that you want to be. There’s a verse I want to share with you. And to keep it fair, before anybody criticizes me, I’m going to give you a second passage to complement it. So, here’s the first one, Proverbs chapter 21 says,

“It’s better to live alone in the desert than with a quarrelsome complaining wife” (Proverbs 21:19).

This is the word of God, so don’t shoot the messenger. What we discover is that some people are like archaeologists, they’re always digging up the past, continually revisiting those painful events. They can’t move on, they’re always looking back, they’re stuck revisiting, rethinking past circumstances and situations. And those that choose to live out their days biting and devouring, destroying one another, often do so against the very people they love the most. They can not only name the day of the week of the offense, but the actual date and time of day. They can tell you whether it was raining or sunny, what your facial expression was, or the tone of your voice, even reminding you word for word what you said or did. And this goes both ways, to be fair it’s not just the wife, but it goes the other way also. Proverbs chapter 26 says,

“As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife” (Proverbs 26:21).

Just as a fire goes out without feeding it, many conflicts disappear when there’s no one going around perpetuating the strife, biting and devouring, destroying one another. And so, I want to ask you to be honest, those of you who maybe like me have battled with a critical spirit; do you want to be someone who tears down or number three someone who’s building others up?

## 3. Building Others Up

Let me read to you what the Bible says again, this is what the apostle Paul said, a man who was a great encourager of the people of God. “Don’t let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29). Every time he spoke, every time he wrote, Paul was building up, he wasn’t tearing people down, he was building others up. He wasn’t going to let any unwholesome talk come out of his mouth, but only that which was helpful for building others up. As you read his writings in the New Testament they’re full of encouragement. Just listen to a few excerpts from one chapter of Romans.

The apostle said in chapter 8, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). He said, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Romans 8:26). He said that, “Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). He said that, “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). And he said, “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

And so, do you want to tear down, destroying one another, like the Pharisees or the devil; or do you want to be a builder? Building others up like the apostle Paul or Jesus who said in Matthew chapter 16,

“I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18).

There are so many wonderful descriptions for Jesus that give us such hope. But this one recorded in Ephesians chapter 2 is so fitting, verse 19 says,

“You’re no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19-20).

The apostle Paul tells us again in first Corinthians chapter 3,

“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

And so, Jesus was always building up, he was opening doors that no one could shut, and whenever someone would sin, the Pharisees would point, blame, and accuse; but Jesus would come and encourage those who’d been kept in captivity to walk away from the bondage of sin. In John chapter 8, there was a woman caught in the act of adultery. The Pharisees pointed to the law, pointed out everything that was wrong and said stone her. Jesus knelt down and began to write on the ground with his finger; most likely writing the sins of her accusers, because one by one they each walked away. John chapter 8, verse 10 tells us,

“Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11).

“Where are your accusers? Where are those who tried to condemn you” He asked? That’s what the Pharisees were, that’s what the devil, our spiritual enemy is, an accuser, but Jesus; Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is our living hope.

Would you determine today to follow him, to build others up and not destroy one another?

You see, we don’t have any idea how God can use one word of encouragement to change a life. Or when you speak blessing into the lives of others how God can build them up. It’s those words as Proverbs chapter 15 says,

“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life” (Proverbs 15:4).

God can use your words to build someone up, because you and I have the words of life. You see, because of what God has done we won’t tear down, but we’re going to build up. We’re going to point people to Jesus, our living hope, our King of Kings and Lord of lords. We’re going to point people to Jesus, the one who forgives sins. We’re going to speak words of hope, words of healing, and words of life.

What do you want to be today? My prayer is to lead a church full of people that are building up and not tearing down, people that are continually building the kingdom of God and pointing others to the one who is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Let’s all pray.

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February 25, 2018

[www.cccemmitsburg.org](http://www.cccemmitsburg.org/)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*