



Galatians 5:13-15

Devouring

1/29/2023

We are going to Galatians 5:13 today.

Up until about this point in the book, Paul has been driving home the point that we don't pay for our forgiveness, redemption, or right standing with God with our good works. Jesus already paid for those things with his cross and resurrection, and to add anything to His finished work is to not believe in His finished work at all. To rely on law-keeping at all makes Jesus of no effect.

But now he is turning his attention to another way the Gospel was being undermined in the Galatian church, and another way the Gospel could be undermined in our church, which is through the failure of professed Christians to be affected by the Gospel in our lives, attitudes, and relationships.

So we have done a lot of heady doctrine until now, and now the focus will shift to how that doctrine should affect our lives. And both of these emphases are vitally important.

We can know about the freedom Jesus brings, but not live in it. We can know about Gospel truth but not feel and experience any of it. And so in this section of Galatians, Paul shifts his focus to applying the Gospel to all of life and pushing the Gospel from our heads into our hearts and hands.

Galatians 5:13-15 [13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

So Paul says that to be a Christian is to be called to freedom. No more religious rule-keeping. No more thinking you have to do anything to be right with God - that's all yours for free by grace through faith.

But we hear that we are totally free and not saved by works, and we know what the big wrong response to that is.

The wrong response is to think that freedom from the law is freedom to live however we want and, and to live like grace gives us a free pass to sin and disobey the Lord.

That's a common but wrong reaction to the doctrine of free grace. We think, "God and I, we have a great thing going. I like to sin. God likes to forgive. So this is working out! I'll keep sinning, he'll keep forgiving, and I'll see you in heaven! Glad to be free from the law! The more I sin, the more He piles on his grace."

This is an idea called anti-nomianism - meaning "no law" or "against law." An antinomian lives like there are no commands, no laws, and that being immoral is essentially OK because we aren't saved by morality.

And we've probably all heard the whisper from the devil on one shoulder when we're tempted to sin: "It'll be forgiven. You aren't perfect anyways. God gives grace. So don't hold back!"

But Paul asks whether that's a valid way to look at grace in Romans 6:1:

Romans 6:1 "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

Paul's answer:

Romans 6:2 By no means!"

By no means. This is strong, emotional language - Paul is repulsed by the idea. He says, literally "NO WAY." The idea that the grace of God in Jesus opens the door to us sinning more is so far from reality that Paul bursts out with - "Oh heck no. Not possible."

Jesus died to free us from having to keep the law to earn our place with God, AND to free us from sin - not to somehow liberate us to live lives that are displeasing to the Father - that's the opposite of liberation. It isn't freedom.

It can feel freeing. If there's some way you really want to disobey God, you can convince yourself for a second that it's ok, or that grace gives you a pass, and that can feel like freedom as you ignore the shouting of your conscience for a minute.

But it's freedom in the same way that jumping out of an airplane without a parachute is flying. It feels like flying, and is tons of fun, for a few minutes. At the end of the day, you aren't celebrating how free you are - that jump wasn't freedom bringing, it was death bringing.

A spending spree on the credit card feels like real freedom for a minute - you're rich and can buy whatever you want - it's free, just swipe. But 10 years from now, the stuff will have worn out and the payments will not have. And the illusion of freedom will be exposed.

So in Galatians 5:13, Paul says we shouldn't think grace frees us to sin, but to serve each other through love:

Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

The law said do all of these good works and present them to God, and we all failed to do so. Now that Jesus has presented his good works to the Father on our behalf, that demand is lifted - the demand that we keep it up to earn our place is gone.

But, as Luther said, while God doesn't need our good works, our neighbor does.

And God calls us to be free by grace through faith and live free by living in obedience, specifically here by serving one another in love.

Take all the effort that used to go into religious rule-keeping and ceremony observation, take all the time spent worrying about whether you're good enough to go to heaven, take all the time you used to spend covering up your messes to keep your place with God and man, and serve one another through love.

Jesus said in:

John 13:35 - "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And Paul helps us in Galatians 5:13 not just by telling us to love, but to serve one another through love. He isn't commanding us only to feel sentimental affection for one another, but to actively serve.

And this is huge - we need to know what love is. And it isn't just what we feel.

Love is, in large part, the active, self-sacrificial, service of others.

That's not all it is - more on that in a second. But love, rather than how we feel or an emotion that we fall in, is following Jesus in serving others. And right where Jesus tells us that people will know we follow Him if we love one another, He demonstrates it like this:

John 13:12-15 “12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

Soon after this scene where He dresses Himself like a slave and does the menial task of washing the feet of the disciples - feet that He formed by his power in their mothers' wombs, He then loves to the extreme and goes to the cross.

He gave Himself for us - the One who was so far above us laid down His life so we could be forgiven.

And our response to the freedom that purchases us is to serve one another in similarly self-sacrificial love. And we are called to do that in a way that makes absolutely no sense if we didn't believe that God is just, that a resurrection is coming, that this life is not all we have, and that the treasure we have in Jesus is worth more than anything we sacrifice to follow Him.

Matthew 5:38-48 “[38] “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ [39] But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. [40] And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. [41] And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. [42] Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.[43] “You have heard that it was said,

‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

You see the active, radical, humble, serving nature of love here: a Roman soldier, an agent of the evil occupiers, forces you to carry his pack one mile, which his totally invalid law allows him to do. And Jesus says, “Carry it two miles.”

Someone sues you to take your clothes, make sure you give him your coat as well.

And apply that law of love everywhere: apply it to your marriage when the love isn’t being reciprocated. Apply it to the boss that is making life difficult.

And love, not only those who love you, but your enemies. Because that’s what God did for us in the Gospel. And if we are going to be His sons (verse 45) and daughters, if we are going to have family resemblance to God, we love like He loves us. With the cross as the greatest example of His love.

This is what we do with our Christian freedom.

And Galatians 5:14 says:

Galatians 5:[14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

If you love people like that, you’re not going to be disobeying God’s law. You can’t disobey his law and how it guides our conduct toward one another if you love them like that. You won’t lie to someone, because you love them. You won’t covet their things, because you’ll be glad they have them even when you don’t - because you love them. You won’t commit adultery because you have Christian freedom, you love your spouse and your God and the honor of your vows. Our freedom frees us to love, not disobey with impunity.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 is the classic love passage, read at a lot of weddings, but don't let it become cliché - ask yourself if this reflects your life because this is what we are called to:

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 (Please put all 7 verses on screen and leave there as I work through page 6 and 7 of this sermon!)

[1] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

[4]a Love is patient and kind;

It's patient, like God has been with us. Believing the Gospel shapes us into people who are shaped by the Gospel. And if God has been patient and kind with us, so we can be with others.

4b love does not envy or boast;

You can't envy somebody that you love. I have a daughter going to a much better school than I went to. And there are a lot of emotions around that - joy that she has this opportunity, sadness that she's growing up, sorrow when we fill out the student loan paperwork.

But I don't envy - because she's my daughter. I want her to have more than I had. And our love for one another is like that.

And when we are the ones who have more, we don't boast, because we aren't trying to be above these people we love.

it is not arrogant [5] or rude.

When you speak to someone about the scriptures or about doctrine, are you considering how your words and actions affect those people? Are you trying to lead them to the truth? Or do you speak just so you can "say what you need to say?" Are you glad if "I told that guy" or if you genuinely, lovingly helped move him toward God with your words?

And social media counts. That's not the place where our Christian freedom buys us the free pass for arrogance or rudeness. Our email isn't the place we are allowed to be arrogant and rude.

[5b It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Do you insist on your own way? Or are you flexible?

If everything has to be the way I want it, I'm putting myself in the place of God. We submit to one another in love.

Are you resentful?

Do you keep a record of the wrongs that people commit against you?

If someone does something wrong to you, do you hang on to it?

Something happened, there was some offense, and you'll just never get over it? You're waiting for an opportunity to avenge it with gossip, or worse.

[7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love puts up with people.

It believes all things - it relentlessly gives the benefit of the doubt. It isn't gullible, but always has faith that God can be working the best in people. It hopes all things - it doesn't get cynical and suspicious. And it just keeps enduring people and all their peopleness.

So look at the shape of the love we are called to. Look how active it is, look how it does things, it serves, it submits, it defers, it is kind and patient.

But we didn't concentrate much on verse 3.

Look at that one specifically:

1 Corinthians 13:3 "[3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

In most of this passage, love is actively serving like Jesus served.

And in verse 3 Paul talks about the most extreme kind of service: giving up your life in service of others, delivering your body to be burned.

But if love is active service, shouldn't this verse read, "If I deliver up my body to be burned, I have loved to the uttermost. I have loved perfectly. I have loved in the greatest possible way.?"

But Paul doesn't say that. He says, "If I deliver up my body to be burned but I don't have love, I gain nothing."

So there is a form of service, of sacrifice, of giving, that isn't necessarily love at all.

It might be: Jesus even said:

John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

The greatest service can be the greatest love.

But, it is possible to give it all away and not be doing so out of love.

There are ways we can give and serve and do the right deeds, but do so without love.

Keep in mind, 1 Corinthians 13:5 says "Love does not seek its own." And I think we can all think of times that we did something that appeared loving, but we did that thing with selfish motives.¹

We taught our kids to behave, which is good, it's obedient to God and loving toward them. But we really just did it because we wanted them to make us look good.

We worked in the kids class, a great opportunity to love and serve and sacrifice. But we did it to be thought of as holy.

We sincerely confessed our sin to someone, because we knew they were going to catch us anyways and we might as well look good.

We gave to the church, but only to get the tax benefit.

Love is the active, self-sacrificial service of others, that isn't seeking its own. That isn't done out of need. That isn't done because we need the acclaim or to be noticed or praised, that isn't done because we are trying to manipulate or attain, that isn't done for our own glory.

¹ This section on not all deeds of service being love were derived from a sermon by John Piper here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/freed-to-love>

It isn't done out of hunger, but out of overflow.

And believing the gospel gives us the freedom to really love like that, because in Jesus we have what we need. We have the "well done" from the Father so we don't need praise, we have confidence for our future so we don't need to manipulate for money, we have fellowship with those who believe so we don't need to flatter each other.

We don't need anything from each other, so we are really free to give selflessly to each other.

Galatians 5:13 again "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Believing the gospel really frees us to love.

But if we aren't filling our hearts with the Gospel, look what we will do:

Galatians 5:[15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

He warns them not to engage in conflict like people who don't believe the Gospel.

Which we often do. When we aren't full, when we're hungry, we go looking for someone to feast on.

He says we might start by biting each other, a pretty mild word that means "To bite or sting, to thwart, vex, irritate."²

Then we really start devouring, feasting on each other. It's the same word that's used in Luke 8:5 to describe birds devouring seed by the road.

And then we can consume one another. The other place this is used in the New Testament is Luke 9:54, where the disciples ask Jesus if they can call fire from heaven to consume their enemies.

² Spiros Zodhiates - Word Study Dictionary

In all good churches there will be conflict. Because people from different backgrounds are drawn together, because we need to discuss truth and error, because emotions run high when we talk about the things that mean the most to us like the Lord, and because we are sinners and we will sin against one another.

But if the discussions, and studies, and confrontations, and efforts to restore are not all driven and bounded by love, we will consume one another eventually.

But in a second we will be taking the Lord's supper which is a regular reminder that we are people who by faith, have been filled with Jesus. Our food is the body and blood of Christ.

John 6:47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

So verse 47 says if you believe you have eternal life. Verse 51 says if you "eat" you have eternal life. So the way we feed on the Bread of Life is to believe in Jesus. The work that gets this bread is belief, to believe is to eat. He is calling us to believe in Him.

But He's not just saying, "I am all you need."

He's not only saying, "You need a relationship with me, a friendship with me, to satisfy your soul." He's saying that, but He's saying far more.

He is saying my flesh is the bread. You need to eat my flesh.

It's one thing to say, "You should be my friend." Another thing to say, "You should eat my body."

So that was gross and shocking. And it was a test: do you just want what Jesus can give you, or do you want Jesus, even when what He calls you to is appalling to you?

John 6:52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

And then Jesus doesn't explain or soften his previous words, He takes it up a notch:

John 6:53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Now they're appalled. In their minds, Jesus has just gone from "Rabbi (teacher)" to "Hannibal Lecter." It sounds psychotic.

They had food laws that they couldn't eat meat with the blood still in it. It had to be drained out. Jews don't drink animal blood. As soon as Noah got off the ark, God gave the command not to consume blood. There was no blood that anyone who knew God could consume.

And Jesus says, "You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood", or you don't have eternal life.

John 6: 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

He taught this in the synagogue! It seems like he gets up in church and advocates cannibalism.

But He is teaching something important.

What's He saying?

Some people historically, and today, read this passage and say, "Jesus is talking about communion - the Lord's Supper." We get eternal life by eating the bread, drinking the wine, and that's how life is conferred to us. We literally feed on the bread and drink the "blood" and then we have taken Him into ourselves.

But we can't take this to be about the Lord's supper. In verse 47, Jesus said, "whoever believes has eternal life." In verse 54, He says, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" So to feed on His flesh and drink his blood is to believe.

So this passage is not about taking the Lord's supper. But taking the Lord's supper is about this passage. When we eat the bread, we are saying, "Jesus is the bread of life." When we drink the cup, we are saying, "His blood gives us life." We are saying that, by believing, we have eaten his flesh and drank his blood.

This passage is not all about the Lord's supper. The Lord's supper is all about what this passage is about. In taking the supper, we're reminding ourselves that Jesus is our food.

For Him to be food, He is going to have to die. Nearly everything we eat has died for us. Today you'll go home and eat chicken that has died, or a cow, or maybe a pig. Or just lettuce that someone decapitated. Our food has nearly all died for us.

And for Jesus to be the food, He's going to have to die. And he did die.

And if that's enough for us, we don't have to bite and devour one another.

Jesus was consumed for us so we don't have to consume one another.

We feast on the body and blood of Jesus, not each other.

Let's take some time to pray in silent - specifically focusing on ways we are biting and devouring one another.

Prayer of Confession.

Assurance of Pardon:

John 6:51 "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh"

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Compare how our culture defines love to how the Bible defines it.
- 2) What makes a deed loving?
- 3) If grace is free, why don't we sin all we want?
- 4) What is the role of obedience in the Christian life if it doesn't get us to God?
- 5) How do we feast on Jesus so we don't have to feast on one another?