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6/6/04

## Galatians 5:6, 13-15 “The Life of Love”

Intro. The churches in Galatia were having problems in their personal relationships. There were frequent internal fights. In v.15 Paul suggested that some in the church were biting and devouring one another. Those two words speak of wild animals engaged in the fury of a deadly struggle. In this case, Paul is using metaphorical language to refer to people who were attacking and hurting each other with words. I believe the works of the flesh listed in v.20 were quite evident in the church there, “. . .hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies.” Then, in v.26 he said, “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” This problem was made worse by the presence and teaching of the Judaizers. They drove a wedge between Jews and Gentiles, between those who were circumcised, and those who were not. Rivalries developed, and perhaps there were even separate house churches that did not speak with one another. Their teaching tended to promote spiritual pride. Those who were circumcised considered themselves a “cut above” the rest! The problem of the Galatians is typically human: egos enter into the debates between people and before long the issue becomes *who* is right, not *what* is right. As a result, there was conflict, divisiveness, and hostility between those who professed to know Christ as Savior.

A similar situation is all too common today. Even in the church and in Christian homes, there is too much conflict, divisiveness, pride, envy, and hostility. Again, Paul warned, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” This reminds me of a poem: There once were two cats of Killkenny.

Each thought there was one cat too many.

They fought and they spit.

They clawed and they bit

Till instead of two cats there weren't any!<sup>1</sup>

How many times have we seen the saga of the Killkenny cats played out in the Lord's church with the same tragic results? An arrogant, self-righteous attitude will display itself in religious pride and conflict. To spit and fight, claw and bite, in our efforts to be “top cat” is only to invite our own ultimate destruction.

What is the answer to this common human problem? The answer is love for others, and that is going to be the topic of my message today. But I am not talking about worldly love. I'm talking about godly love. So if you want to overcome the problems of strife, conflict, divisiveness, and hostility, then let's see together God's answer from this text of Scripture. If you want to experience love, joy, and peace in your relationships, then I hope you will listen today.

Now, the starting place is:

### I. RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE BY FAITH

Paul's word for “love here is not the word normally used for human and natural love, but *agape*, God's love. 1 John 4:8 says, “God is love.” Therefore, God is the source of all true love, and

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<sup>1</sup> Al Maxey, *The Aloha Spirit*.

we must look to Him for the capacity to love as we ought. Not only is He the source, but He defines true love by His own action. In Gal. 2:20 Paul said, "...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Jesus suffered incredibly on the cross to save us from our sin. We know love in the New Testament sense only because we see it in the cross; and to see this love is to be affected by it. Likewise, 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us."

Now the question is, "How is God's love transferred into our lives?" After all, by nature we tend to be self-centered, not loving. The answer is two-fold. First, it is by the Holy Spirit coming into the life of a believer. Rom. 5:5 says, "...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God's love is produced by the Holy Spirit. In fact, in v.22 he says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love...."

Because of his trust by many Arab tribes, the famous British scholar and soldier Lawrence of Arabia participated in the Paris peace talks after World War I. Several Arab leaders came with him to Paris and stayed in the same hotel. When they went into their bathrooms, they were astounded to discover they could bring seemingly unlimited amounts of water into the bathtub or sink simply by turning the handle on a faucet. When preparing to leave Paris, they removed the faucets and packed them in their luggage, thinking that the faucets themselves magically created the vast amounts of water. When they told Lawrence what they had done, he explained that the faucets were useless unless connected to pipes that were, in turn, connected to a source of water. In the same way, a person who is not connected to Jesus by faith, and who has not received the Holy Spirit, has no source of godly love.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we receive the Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said in v.6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." What is really important is not outward rituals such as circumcision, or baptism. You can be baptized 10 times and still go to hell. What is really important is faith in Christ. And here we see that true faith produces good works, which are an expression of love. Eph. 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Faith and love produce good works.

So if we are going to be able to love as we should, we need to place our faith in Jesus Christ. Then, we will also receive the Holy Spirit, who will produce love in our lives. We also need to make sure our faith is genuine. Only then will we have the Spirit, and true love. Why is it that Christians claim to have the Spirit, but show little of His love? Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Have you received the Holy Spirit? If not, why not do so today? And if you have already received the Spirit, you need to make sure you are relying upon the Spirit to create God's love more fully within you. But the Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He uses the Word of God, prayer, worship, and the fellowship of believers to build us up in Christ, and to enable us to love. If you want to love as you ought, you need to cultivate your walk with the Lord in these ways. It has been my observation that growing, believing, obedient Christians are the ones who become the most loving.

Next,

## II. LET LOVE GUIDE YOUR MORAL DECISIONS

It is important that we learn to treat people right. And you need some kind of guidance, for we tend to sin against people, and hurt people, and ignore their needs. In this context, Paul is

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<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 97.

talking about freedom. I'm sure that Paul's opponents were always charging that Paul's gospel of liberty would lead to lawlessness. But Paul never advocated unrestrained freedom. The Judaizers advocating restraining sin by legal regulations. But Paul advocated restraining sin in other ways. Next week we will see how the Spirit restrains sin in a believer's life. Today, we will focus on the role of love in restraining sin, and promoting positive action. So Paul is in essence saying, "You profess yourselves anxious to fulfill the law; I'll show you a simple and comprehensive way of fulfilling it." The will of God with respect to our relationship to others can be distilled down into the word "love." In v.14 he said, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" To recall all laws, in order to obey them with reference to a neighbor, would be a tedious and wearisome code of morals. But to love your neighbor is to obey and execute all obligations toward a neighbor. When a Christian genuinely loves others, he fulfills all the moral elements of the Mosaic Law.

The amazing thing about love is that it takes the place of all the laws God gave. Paul strongly emphasizes this fact as we can see from the Greek language. It is *ho pas nomos* "the entire law." The idea of totality is expressed more strongly by the exceptional position of *pas* (all). So he is saying that the whole law is performed in the keeping of this one command. Love does not need the prescriptions of the law, because its very nature is to fulfill the law's demands. Likewise, Rom. 13:8 says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." The person who lives by faith works under the internal compulsion of love and does not need the outward compulsion of law.

It should be quite evident that love fulfills the law. Love will not do any of the sinful actions listed in vv.19-21. Romans 13:10 says, "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." For example, love would not commit adultery against a spouse. Love would certainly not murder someone. You will not bear false witness against someone you love. When you love, you will not steal from anyone.

I remember when my son Andrew had a large jug of pennies. Now the law says, "You shall not steal." But even though I used to run short of money at the end of most months, I did not take that money from him. Why? Because of the law? No, but because of love.

Notice again that love "fulfills" the law. Law commands but gives no power to get its injunctions executed. On the other hand, love motivates and empowers to obey. Furthermore, without love, a person may only obey the letter of the law, and do as little as possible, or look for loopholes around doing the law. But love fulfills the law completely.

Notice also the objects of our love. We are commanded to love "our neighbor." Jews tended to limit their obligation to love to fellow Jews, but Jesus taught that your neighbor includes anyone in need that is providentially placed near you. Illustration: For 15 years Dennis Prager asked high school students throughout America whether, in an emergency situation, they would save their dog or a stranger first. Most students answered that they would not save the stranger first, but their dog. They would say, "I love my dog, I don't love the stranger." I would say this expresses misplaced priorities!<sup>3</sup>

So I hope you are convinced that love is what you need to live the Christian life. It is far more effective than legal restraint. There is an inward power and motivation to love that is lacking in legalism. Love is the key to experiencing freedom without legalism, and without abuse of freedom. So if you want to live right and live free, you must be guided by love. I want to challenge you to make sure you have received the endless supply of God's love by His Spirit, and that in

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Prager in *Good News*.

every situation you ask, "What would love do?" That will be an adequate guide and motivation for day to day living.

However, we have not discharged our duty to love simply by talking about love. So I want to move on to my last point:

### III. LOVE SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN PRACTICAL WAYS

Love can seem abstract, or purely an emotion. But the kind of love the Bible talks about is practical, and is expressed with actions that meet needs. In v.13 Paul said, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Paul states here that we are to use our liberty to serve one another. By nature we are so bound by sin and false religion that we are not free to do what God wills. But God has set us free to serve Him, and to serve others. The word translated "serve" (*douleuo*) is a strong word. It is not the word *diakoneo*, to minister as a servant. The word used here actually means, "to serve as a slave." In a context about freedom, this is a paradox indeed. However, it is not a contradiction, for such service is voluntary, from the heart. We are free to imitate Christ, who "took the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He put on the clothing of a slave in the upper room and washed the disciples' feet. He then said in John 13:14, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." And when Christ incarnates Himself in believers, He endows them with the same nature of servanthood.

Dr. Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, says that one of the languages of love is service. I agree that service is one primary way to show love. When you show love by serving someone, you are saying, "What can I do to help you? How can I make your life easier?" Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister...." 1 Jn. 3:18 says, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." In v.6 of our text, Paul says that what is really important is "faith *working* through love." Later, in 6:10, Paul said, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

But what is it that will motivate and enable us to serve one another, and do good works? Paul's answer is love. Even human love will cause a person to serve others. What is it that causes a young mother to devote hours and hours of her time to her young child? What causes her to get up in the middle of the night to feed her and comfort her when she cries? It is love! Love works as the dynamic of human relationships.

I believe we should apply this by examining specific ways we should show love by serving one another. When someone is sick, they often need ministry. Many of you have shown love by taking food to a sick person. Or perhaps you can offer to cut their grass. There are other ways we can show love by our service. In Gal. 6:2 Paul said, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." If you see someone bearing a burden too great to bear alone, offer to help them!

Conclusion: There is a story told about Sam Rayburn who was Speaker for the House of Representatives longer than any other man. One of his friends lost a teenage daughter and early the next morning Rayburn knocked on his door. "I just came by to see what I could do to help." The father replied that there was nothing to do. "Well," Rayburn said, "have you had your coffee this morning?" The man replied that they had not taken time for breakfast. While Rayburn was working in the kitchen, the man came in and said, "Mr. Speaker, I thought you were supposed to be having breakfast at the White House this morning." "Well, I was, but I called the President and told him I

had a friend who was in trouble and I could not come.” What a different world this would be if we would learn to love with unselfish service to others!<sup>4</sup>

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Oliver B. Greene [vv. 7-13], *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1962); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968); J.B. Lightfoot [vv. 7-13], *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957); John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987); Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957); Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon tapes on this text dated 11/18/84 & 11/25/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>4</sup> Pulpit Helps Illustration Collection II, © 1995, 1996, 1999 by AMG.