

**GALATIANS - SERMON 27**  
**GALATIANS 5:19-21 — THE WORKS OF THE FLESH**  
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INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:13-21

It is good to understand the nature of the works of the flesh so that we might avoid them. Paul gives the Galatians a list of those things which constitute the works of the flesh and those things which constitute the works of the Spirit. The sins listed in verses 19-21 are called the works of the flesh. We have learned the term flesh stands for the imbalanced appetites of our human bodies (Romans 8:13). Conversion does nothing to change the fallen condition of our bodies. The change of our bodies will not occur until resurrection. We have no quarrel with the material composition of our bodies. There is nothing inherently evil about our material bodies (the gnostic heresy). When God originally created the world He called it all *very good*. [The Lord Jesus Christ took on a material body and yet He was not sinful and no sin was found in Him.] We also have no quarrel with the God-given desires of our bodies. We are not at war with our humanity, but with our fallenness. Our war is with our imbalanced appetites. Paul wants us to understand that even as believers we retain our fallen bodies and thereby have the capacity to commit any one of the sins listed in verses 19-21. The list is horrible, but we have evidence in the Scriptures of believing people committing each of the sins listed. For example Noah committed the sin of drunkenness, David the sin of murder, Solomon the sin of idolatry, etc. The best of men fall into these sins because all believing men retain their fallen bodies with the imbalanced appetites thereof. Hence we must take heed lest we fall also.

OUTLINE:

- I THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THESE SINS.
- II THE WARNING ISSUED.

I THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THESE SINS.

A The list is representative - not exhaustive

The list we have in verses 19-21 is representative - not exhaustive. The list seems to represent the most common sins and the ones probably manifesting among the Galatians at the time of Paul's writing.

Galatians 5:19-21

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The phrase '*which are*' might also mean *which are of this sort*. The concluding phrase in verse 21 *and the like* also indicates that the list is representative, not exhaustive.

B The list divides into categories. In reviewing the list and studying the words it is

important not to fill our minds with the corruption they represent. We need only say enough to accurately reflect the meaning of the words.

- 1 SEXUAL SINS: The first category is that of sexual sins; *adultery, fornication, and uncleanness, lewdness.*

*adultery* - a violation of the marriage covenant. Physical relationship within the marriage is entirely appropriate while those same relationships outside the marriage are entirely wrong.

*fornication* - a broad term including every type of sexual deviancy (including - adultery, pre-marital sex, prostitution, incest, homosexuality, etc).

*uncleanness* - another broad term incorporating anything that would make one impure. Uncleanness is the opposite of moral cleanness. It would include those things which would make one impure even though they do not involve a sexual act with another person (e.g. coveting another man's wife).

*lewdness (lasciviousness)* - one who abandons himself to his sensual appetites without restraint. This term describes uncontrolled and unrestrained expression of lust.

These terms address forms of behavior that overlap and interact with each other. They refer to not only gross acts of sin, but also to all such words, thoughts and actions that lead up to such acts.

In preaching and teaching against these sins we must make certain to explain that none of these terms apply to the marriage relationship.

Hebrews 13:4

*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

Sexual activity outside of marriage is always wrong, but within the marriage it is right and wholesome.

- 2 RELIGIOUS SINS: The second category is that of religious sins; *idolatry, sorcery* (vs 20). These two religious sins were closely associated with the sexual sins because in much of the pagan religion of that time sexual sins were incorporated into their practices.

*idolatry*

- in the narrow sense involves the worship or veneration of images or the use of images in any way in the worship of God. As such it is a violation of the second commandment. There are only two authorized symbols in new covenant worship, bread and wine in the Lord's supper. The Roman and Greek Orthodox churches boldly transgress the second commandment and encourage the practice of idolatry by the use of their images in worship.

- *idolatry* in the broader sense refers to anything that becomes a substitute for God in our life. Anything relied upon or trusted in place of God becomes an idol to us. For example reliance upon civil government for peace and safety is a form of idolatry. Unless the civil government is in subordination to the law of God it is not a proper source of trust and reliance.

*sorcery* - (*witchcraft*) this refers to the use of drugs, magic and sorcery in worship. Cultic rituals are sorceries. The word in the original is φαρμακεία from which we get our word pharmacy. The pagan priests used narcotics and drugs in their worship services.

- 3 SOCIAL SINS: The third category is that of social sins; *hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries.*

*hatred* - an attitude of animosity toward another person resulting in the desire for their destruction.

*contentions (variance)* - someone who engages in contentious behavior and possesses an argumentative spirit. This kind of person loves to argue for arguing's sake with no interest in coming to an understanding of the truth.

*jealousies (emulations)* - this is jealousy resulting in malice towards another, motivated out of the fear that we will lose to that person what we have (honor, position, etc.).

*outbursts of wrath* - a passionate indignation toward others that boils over into abusive speech and conduct. This term refers to one who does not hide one's wrath. This is expressive wrath.

*selfish ambitions (strife)* - conflict arising from each person striving to exalt himself above the others. It arises from a self-ambition to have one's own way regardless of the cost.

*dissensions (sedition)* - consists of creating divisions and parties against stated authorities. It is the 'us-against-them' mentality coupled with the spirit of rebellion. It is the opposite of the spirit of loyalty, resolution and reconciliation.

*heresies* - the building of a following around a false doctrine or practice. There is the illusion of substance to this form of rebellion.

*envy* - This is the displeasure that arises when we see someone enjoying something that we do not have. It provokes us to attempt to get that thing from the other person. It is the opposite of jealousy. Jealous involves the fear of losing what you have while envy is the desire to get what is not yours.

*murders* - the ultimate act of envy in finally desiring the death and destruction of another individual. Murder is in the heart of every person. It is as much a sin of the heart as it is of the hand.

*drunkenness* - usually this sin is a social sin. Drunkenness is the result of excessive consumption of alcohol ending in the loss of sound reason and competent judgment. It is the sin of excessive use of alcohol. Drunkenness is a sin and not a disease (note that pneumonia or malaria are not in this list).

Hence, alcoholism is not a disease to be treated, but a sin to be repented of. The concept of alcoholism as a disease is a lie fostered by contemporary psychology.

*revelries* - this is nothing more or less than wild parties leading to sinful, excessive behavior. Attending a party is not wrong, but one should practice the maxim of never doing at a party what you would not do anywhere else.

*and the like* - any other sins of the flesh. This final statement proves that this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but merely representative of the works of the flesh.

These three categories sum up the sins of the flesh. Sexual sins are sins against oneself in a way (1 Corinthians 6:18). Religious sins are sins against God. The social sins are sins against our fellow man - in not loving him as ourselves. This is an indicative list of the sins of flesh.

Any of these sins are sins into which we as Christians may fall. This should lead us to a healthy disgust of our flesh (imbalanced appetites of the body) as Paul exhibits elsewhere.

Romans 7:18

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

## II THE WARNING ISSUED, GALATIANS 5:21B

*just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The subject is the loss of heaven. Those who practice such sins will not inherit heaven. On the face this would seem to rule every one out. We have all committed some or several of these sins as Christians. Paul is not saying that the single commission of any of these sins will cast us out of heaven. He is saying that those who practice such things shall not gain heaven. It is a present participle speaking of an on-going characteristic of one's life. Those who are habitually practitioners any of one of the sins of the flesh categorized above has not been saved and shall not, as such, be saved. The Bible is very clear that there is no such thing as a non-transformed believer.

Herein we have a condemnation fo the currently popularly doctrine called the carnal Christian. It is an ungodly and unbiblical doctrine which results in giving unsaved people an assurance of salvation which is not theirs. The warning against this doctrine is found frequently in the Scriptures.

#### 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

On a positive note Paul is saying that all sorts of people can be saved - *such were some of you*. But those saved who were such as the list describes have been *washed*. In salvation the people of God are transformed, not unto absolute perfection, but transformed nevertheless. The dominating characteristic of a life is changed.

#### Ephesians 5:5-8

*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*

We are warned against those who might *deceive* you into thinking that the practitioners of such sins can expect salvation.

#### Colossians 3:5-7

*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

The sins listed have not prevented ultimate salvation among those who *once walked ... in them*, but it is in the past tense. They once walked and lived in such sins, but not in the continuing sense.

#### Romans 8:13

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

The difference between the saved and the lost is in the handling of the sins listed. The unsaved walk in those sins as a practitioner of them. The saved individual, though committing some of those sins is continually striving to mortify them.

#### Conclusion:

The warning of Paul is that the carnal Christian is no Christian at all.

Those with a sensitive conscience, who are wounded by these words and can only think of their constant sinning, in fact, are demonstrating their desire not to walk in the flesh. The one condemned by these Scriptures is the one who is happy to walk in the flesh, not

miserable in so doing. A sensitive conscience is a good evidence of transformation in progress. Paul felt himself *wretched*. Striving is evidence of salvation.

As one evidence of salvation there is a heart-broken strife against these invading sins in us. In the next passage we will see another evidence of salvation in the fruits of the Spirit.

Hymn # 574