

Works of the Flesh

In previous lessons we have been looking at a broader picture of what a Christian looks like. Paul did an excellent job in Romans 12-15 of painting a picture of this for us. Now, as we move forward in our study, we want to start looking at some more specific ideas of what the Christian life is supposed to look like. We are going to, with this study, be considering part of Galatians 5, and one of the lists that Paul records for us of things that the Christian is to avoid.

As we begin into this part of our study, it is important to understand that the practices that Paul identifies are not merely suggestions. He is not telling the Christian that it's a good idea to stay away from these things. He is revealing to us the fact that these sinful practices condemn us before God, and will cause us to lose our souls eternally. Consider the last part of Galatians 5:21:

...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).

Do we think that we can “not inherit the kingdom of God” and still be saved? Certainly not! So, as we delve into these topics, we need to see the urgency in forsaking these practices so that we can have a relationship with God. To ignore the warnings given by Paul would be to condemn ourselves eternally.

Walk in the Spirit...

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

In the next lesson, we are going to spend some more time looking at Paul's identification of the “fruit of the Spirit.” But, for our purposes now, we want to see the contrast that Paul established between walking in the Spirit, and fulfilling the lust of the flesh. One cannot be doing both at the same time! The distinction is that the one who is walking in the Spirit has turned himself over to the instructions of the Lord, while the one who is not is focused on fulfilling his own lusts. We spent some time in the previous lessons showing the need for one to put the old man of sin to death, and to raise up a new creature (Romans 6). We also showed how the result of doing this is that we put our own selfish desires aside, and adopt God's instructions for our lives. Paul expressed this by saying:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

While we have seen these principles in general terms, in Galatians 5 Paul gets into some very specific examples of the types of practices we need to avoid if we want to be walking in the Spirit. These practices conflict with the nature we are supposed to adopt when we claim to be the children of God:

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Galatians 5:17).

We cannot continue to give in to the flesh if we are truly walking in the Spirit. Despite what we often hear in the religious world, God does care about our practices. Continuing in sin excludes us from the kingdom of God!

The Works of the Flesh...

Paul makes the observation in Galatians 5:19 that “the works of the flesh are evident...” Paul identifies these works of the flesh as things that should be easily known and understood to be contrary to the will of God. The word he used here, which is translated as “evident” means:

δῆλος, η, ον; φανερόςb, ά, όν: pertaining to being clearly and easily able to be known—‘clearly known, easily known, evident, plain, clear.’¹

While Paul makes the point that these things should be clearly and easily known, the world has corrupted the will of God so much that many of these things are readily accepted by those professing to be Christians! Rather than being deceived by the lies that Satan has so readily lays out for us, we need to realize that these sinful practices are evident. The child of God is not to be participating in them at all.

It has been suggested that the list of sins that Paul chronicles here can be broken up into 4 different categories. The first category has to do with sensuality. The second would encompass false religions. The third has to do with interactions with other people. The last has to do with personal temperance. Each could also be classified according to John’s designations:

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

No matter how we might classify the sins, they are sins. All of these actions are contrary to God’s revealed word for us, and will cause us to “not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Adultery

Adultery is defined as:

μοιχεύω; μοιχάομαι; μοιχεία, ας f: sexual intercourse of a man with a married woman other than his own spouse—‘to commit adultery, adultery.’²

We often think of adultery being the sexual act between two people who are married, just not to one another. We call it, in our modern vernacular, cheating on one’s spouse. This is true, and certainly condemned by these teachings. However, in the New Testament, God’s instructions go beyond this idea. For example, Jesus makes it clear that one who divorces his wife without her committing adultery before the dissolution of the marriage has no right to remarry. One who does so is guilty of this same sin as the one who cheats on his mate!

He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:8–9)

Adultery, in many of its forms, has become acceptable to our society. What was once documented as a punishable crime has become nothing more than a punchline of a joke in many ways. On some level, most people will still say there is something wrong about committing adultery, but it doesn’t really mean anything. There are no consequences, and they think nothing of the ramifications of the

1 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains 1996* : 341. Print.

2 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains 1996* : 771. Print.

actions beyond the feelings of someone else. It is, however, clear that God has taken the offense to be far greater than men want to admit:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27–28)

“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31–32)

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. (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

We need to take this sin as seriously as God has taken it. He said that there is no place in the kingdom of God for those who are adulterers. We can, of course, consider the other things that Paul itemized in 1 Corinthians 6 as we continue our studies. For the moment, we want to see the dire ramifications of adultery: it will keep one out of heaven!

As we consider each of the things that Paul identifies as the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5, it is important to realize that one does not have to stay in the confines of those sins, they do not have to remain guilty! Notice, in 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul said that some of the Corinthians had been guilty of these sins, “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.” While they had once been guilty of these things, and separated from God (unable to “inherit the kingdom of God”), this was no longer the case. One who has been guilty of these sins can repent! Repentance demands that the perpetrator stop committing the sin, and start living the holy life that God demands. One can not continue in an adulterous relationship, and still be faithful to God! To be able to “inherit the kingdom of God” such a one must leave the adulterous relationship, and continue to walk in righteousness.

Fornication

Paul continues the theme of the sins of sensuality by identifying *fornication* as the next sin on his list. Fornication is a word that is more broad than the adultery mentioned previously. Consider:

πορνεύω; ἐκπορνεύω; πορνεία, ας f: to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution—‘to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution.’

πορνεύω: ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἀμαρτάνει ‘the person who commits immorality sins against his own body’ 1 Cor 6:18.

ἐκπορνεύω: ὡς Σόδομα καὶ Γόμορρα ... ἐκπορνεύσασαι ‘they committed sexual immorality ... like Sodom and Gomorrah’ Jd 7.

πορνεία: τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας ‘this is God’s will (for you; he wants you) to be consecrated to him and to abstain from sexual immorality’ 1 Th 4:3. In some NT contexts πορνεία may refer specifically to incest.³

³ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 770. Print.

This word encompasses all manner of sexual immorality. For example, fornication would include adultery, though adultery would not include fornication. Quite often, we think of adultery being the sin of sexual relations between people who are married, but not to one another, and fornication being the sin of unmarried sexual relations. Sometimes that is the case, and a justifiable way to distinguish between the two situations. However, in scripture, the concept of fornication goes much deeper than to only identify relations between an unmarried couple. The word also encompasses such diversions from God's plan for the marital relationship as homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, and any other deviancy that man can come up with in his own mind.

In our society, premarital sexual relations are not frowned upon in any way. In fact, in our current setting, those who refrain from such relations are thought of as strange. How, or why, would anyone abstain from such? And yet God is clear that He has created the sexual relationship for only one relationship: marriage.

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4).

Just because something has become normalized in our society does not make it right. Just because even most of the people around us have decided that they will accept something, and not condemn it, does not mean that God will accept it. God has been plain: those who practice such things cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven!

Uncleanness

It appears that Paul, as he is progressing through these sins of sensuality, is moving from specific to general in nature. The term that is used here for uncleanness (impurity, ESV), is:

ἀκαθαρσία, -ας, ἡ, (ἀκάθαρτος), [fr. Hippocr. down], uncleanness;

a. physical: Mt. 23:27.

b. in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living: Ro. 1:24; 6:19; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:7; used of impure motives in 1 Th. 2:3. (Dem. p. 553, 12.) Cf. Tittmann i. p. 150 sq.⁴

While the word could be referencing physical uncleanness, we can suppose that in the context Paul is addressing he is discussing moral impurity. He was identifying living a lustful, luxurious, profligate (recklessly extravagant or wasteful in the use of resources) life. So, while this often would include many of the sexual sins that had previously been addressed and condemned, it could and would go further than the typical context of those words. This word would overlap the sexual sins with the extravagant lifestyle that would often accompany it. Things have not really changed much since Paul's penning of this letter. People today have the same type of approach to life. How many who have excessive wealth, and spend it on frivolous living also couple that with some proclivity toward sexual sins (strip clubs, prostitution, pornography, etc...)? Certainly these sins are not reserved for only those who might have excessive wealth. There are many who live the "lustful, luxurious, profligate" life without having what we might consider to be excessive wealth.

Lewdness

The final word in Paul's first section of sins is lewdness. Other translations have *sensuality* or *lasciviousness*. This word is defined as:

⁴ Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti 1889* : 21. Print.

88.272 ἀσελγεία, ας f: behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness—'licentious behavior, extreme immorality.' μή μετανοήσαντων ἐπὶ τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ ἀσελγείᾳ ἣ ἔπραξαν 'they have not repented of the filthy things they have done, their immorality and licentious deeds' 2 Cor 12:21. In some languages the equivalent of 'licentious behavior' would be 'to live like a dog' or 'to act like a goat' or 'to be a rooster,' in each instance pertaining to promiscuous sexual behavior.⁵

Thayer says this of the word used here:

unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence: Mk. 7:22 (where it is uncertain what particular vice is spoken of); of gluttony and venery, Jude 4; plur., 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:2 (for Rec. ἀπωλείαις), 18; of carnality, lasciviousness: 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 2 Pet. 2:7; plur. "wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc." (Fritzsche), Ro. 13:13.⁶

Understanding how this word was used when it was penned is very helpful to understand Paul's applications. Notice that the word includes "wanton acts or manners, filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females..." The idea conveyed would encompass such things as dancing, profanity, dirty jokes, pornography, and the like. While there is an emphasis placed on sexual sins once again, notice that this word is further reaching than only those classifications of sins. Words like "outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence" are used to describe the idea Paul was conveying to his audience. We can certainly see these types of behaviors in the world around us. Some are so outlandish that even those who are participating know that their behavior is classified in this way! We ought to be able to see that this behavior is contrary to the instructions of God.

It is interesting that many of these "works of the flesh" are disputed among people today. We often hear someone say, "The Bible doesn't condemn this!" They are trying to establish that unless the Bible specifically condemns what they are wanting to participate in, then it must be acceptable to God. Notice how some of these terms used by Paul have a very broad meaning and therefore application. We can also see that as Paul completes his list in verse 21, he concludes with the phrase "and the like..." This indicates that if there are any other activities that would be similar to the things he has already cited, they are included. We are expected to be able to use our common sense, and our ability to reason to be able to tell the difference between what is a "work of the flesh" and what is a "fruit of the Spirit." When someone argues from a position of "The Bible doesn't specifically condemn this practice!" they are missing the point of Paul's instruction. Did God have to specifically condemn every sinful practice that could possibly be invented in the mind of man for all time in scripture? Certainly not!

Idolatry

The next sin addressed by Paul in our context was idolatry. Idolatry has, from near the very beginning of time, been a problem for mankind. It did not take men long to take the idea of God and begin to formulate his own image of what that meant. They ignored God's own revelation, and instead began to worship the "creature rather than the creator" (Romans 1:25).

Idolatry is the practice of worshiping something other than God. Throughout the Old Testament, God declared that His people were to "have no other gods before" Him (Exodus 20:3). This meant

⁵ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 770. Print.

⁶ Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* 1889 : 79–80. Print.

that they were not to have any other gods in His presence. It was not acceptable to have some other god that they served, as long as it was served in some secondary position to Jehovah! He would not tolerate any false gods in His presence at all. Jehovah is a jealous God, and will not share his glory with any other thing!

By the time we get to the first century, idolatry was identified as one of the significant problems among the pagans. Throughout the Greek and Roman empires, idolatry was rampant. There were many other sins that were directly connected to the idolatry as well. For example, male and female temple prostitutes were an integral part of the worship of many of the false gods. Those who were being converted out of paganism would have struggled with leaving their idolatry behind. We have already looked at, in previous lessons, such things as eating the meats that were sacrificed to these idols, and discussed there the difficulties some of these people would have had leaving their perceptions and beliefs behind.

Today, at least in our culture in the United States, literal idolatry is not nearly the issue it has been in times past. However, when we consider that anything worshiped instead of God is idolatry, we may be able to see that idolatry is still a rampant problem. Consider what Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

In a similar list of sinful practices, Paul listed covetousness, which, he said, is idolatry. We would not normally think about covetousness as being “idolatry.” However, when we think of how covetousness consumes a person, and keeps him from being able to do the will of God, it is evident that he can be worshiping something other than God! Any number of things can fall into the same type of category. While we might not literally have a temple, and a statue that we fall down before, there are many things that are worshiped in our society by putting them in a greater position of prominence to us than God and His will for us!

Sorcery

The word that Paul used next is interesting. We translate the word as *witchcraft* or *sorcery*. The word is actually:

φάρμακεία, φάρμακον [pharmakeia /far-mak-i-ah/] n f. From 5332; GK 5758 and 5760; Three occurrences; AV translates as “sorcery” twice, and “witchcraft” once. 1 the use or the administering of drugs. 2 poisoning. 3 sorcery, magical arts, often found in connection with idolatry and fostered by it. 4 metaph. the deceptions and seductions of idolatry.⁷

As you can see, the word originally had to do with the use of drugs. We get our word *pharmacy* from this Greek word. The word originally had to do with using drugs to alter one’s mind. It then began to be used to identify the idea of poisoning someone, using those drugs. Eventually, it became associated with sorcery and the “magical arts” that would be associated with idolatry. It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul used this word immediately following *idolatry* in his list of sinful practices. Using this word would identify all of the uses of it as opposed to God’s instructions. Paul, of course, was not speaking of using helpful drugs that would be used for medicinal purposes (for the good of the person taking them), but rather he was speaking of the kinds of drugs that would be used for illicit purposes. Drugs that would alter the mind, and cause one to believe the illusion of the witchcraft or sorcery. Anything that had to do with the sinful practices that arose surrounding those mind altering drugs would be a part of Paul’s condemnation.

⁷ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

While we certainly have some who claim to be a part of witchcraft and sorcery today, the biggest issue in our current society would be the acceptance of mind altering drugs, and the use of them for recreational purposes. Some argue that these things are not a bit deal. And yet, we can see that Paul connected them quite closely with other practices that are condemned by God!

Hatred

With this word, Paul begins his 3rd group of sinful practices. The next few words seem to target the relationship between men or more specifically, brethren. This word, translated as *hatred* in the NKJV is:

ἔχθρα, ας f: a state of enmity with someone—‘enmity, being an enemy of.’ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν; ‘do you not know that being friendly with the world means being at enmity with God?’ Jas 4:4.⁸

This word goes beyond how one feels about another, and addresses how he treats him. It is not conveying simply an attitude of ill will, but rather, denoting that a person treats another as his enemy. Just as we would say that love is shown through actions, so is the lack of love. This idea of hatred is the opposite of love!

If we understand the idea of love meaning that we put others first, and seek their best interests, then the applications of this word become more obvious. Hatred is displayed by actions. Often times, brethren will not say that they hate another, but it is shown in their actions. When a Christian refuses to put their brethren ahead of themselves, and when they fail to truly seek the best interest of others, they are exposing this attitude. They have established enmity, which is either a sign of a destroyed relationship, or will instigate the destruction of that relationship!

Contentions

Like with previous portions of this same list, Paul seems to build upon ideas as he progresses. Each word in this part of the list seems to signify escalation of ill will toward others. Each word chosen by Paul displays another step in the digression of the relationships between brethren. This word is:

ἔρις^a, ιδος f: conflict resulting from rivalry and discord—‘strife, discord.’ ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις, οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε; ‘when there is jealousy and strife among you, doesn’t this prove that you are people of this world?’ 1 Cor 3:3. In a number of languages the type of strife referred to by ἔρις is frequently described as verbal, for example, ‘always saying bad things about one another’ or ‘never having a good word to say to one another.’⁹

ἐρίζω; ἔριςb, ιδος f: to express differences of opinion, with at least some measure of antagonism or hostility—‘to argue, quarrel, dispute.’

ἐρίζω: οὐκ ἐρίσει οὐδὲ κραυγάσει ‘he will not argue or shout’ Mt 12:19.

ἔρις^b: ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις ‘for when there is jealousy among you and you quarrel with one another’ 1 Cor 3:3. In a number of contexts in which ἔρις occurs, it is difficult to determine whether there is definite verbal involvement or whether the reference is essentially to a state of rivalry or strife (see 39.22).¹⁰

This strife (as some versions translate the word) is the next step in hatred mentioned previously.

8 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 492–493. Print.

9 *ibid* 437

10 *ibid* 494

Hatred is that establishment of enmity, while contentions or strife is the specific response that is elicited because of the hatred. One cannot claim to love his brethren, then stir up strife toward them.

As we are considering these terms, it is important to be reminded that Paul is not addressing the idea of standing for truth here. Many want to accuse those who demand authority for practices of causing strife with their brethren. This is like Ahab's accusation against Elijah:

Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals (1 Kings 18:17–18).

The strife, or contentions that Paul is addressing is the direct result of the hatred that one has in his heart toward his brethren. These contentions are caused by the actions that stem from this poor attitude toward brethren. How could this type of strife not occur, when brethren are looking out for themselves, and ignoring what is best for others? If two people hold those same attitudes, they will be constantly at odds with one another over everything they do!

Jealousies

The word used next by Paul is an interesting one, as it can be either a positive or negative application depending on the context. Consider how a couple of lexicons handle the word:

ζήλος [zelos /dzay·los/] n m/n. From 2204; TDNT 2:877; TDNTA 297; GK 2419; 17 occurrences; AV translates as "zeal" six times, "envying" five times, "indignation" twice, "envy" once, "fervent mind" once, "jealousy" once, and "emulation" once. 1 excitement of mind, ardour, fervour of spirit. 1A zeal, ardour in embracing, pursuing, defending anything. 1A1 zeal in behalf of, for a person or thing. 1A2 the fierceness of indignation, punitive zeal. 1B an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy.¹¹

1. zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything: 2 Co. 7:11; 9:2; κατὰ ζήλος, as respects zeal (in maintaining religion), Phil. 3:6; with gen. of the obj., zeal in behalf of, for a pers. or thing, Jn. 2:17 fr. Ps. 68 (69):10; Ro. 10:2, (1 Macc. 2:58; Soph. O. C. 943); ὑπέρ τινος, gen. of pers., 2 Co. 7:7; Col. 4:13 Rec. with subject. gen. ζήλω θεοῦ, with a jealousy such as God has, hence most pure and solicitous for their salvation, 2 Co. 11:2; the fierceness of indignation, punitive zeal, πυρός (of penal fire, which is personified [see πῦρ, fin.]), Heb. 10:27 (Is. 26:11; Sap. 5:18).

2. an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy: Ro. 13:13; 1 Co. 3:3; Jas. 3:14, 16; ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου, Acts 5:17; 13:45; plur. ζήλοι, now the stirrings or motions of ζήλος, now its outbursts and manifestations: 2 Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; but in both pass. L T Tr [WH, yet in Gal. l. c. WH only in txt.] have adopted ζήλος (ζήλοι τε καὶ φθόνοι, Plat. legg. 3 p. 679 c.). [On the distinction between ζήλος (which may be used in a good sense) and φθόνος (used only in a bad sense) cf. Trench, Syn. § xxvi.; Cope on Aristot. rhct. 2, 11, 1 (διὸ καὶ ἐπεικέες ἐστὶν ὁ ζήλος καὶ ἐπεικῶν, τὸ δὲ φθονεῖν φαῦλον καὶ φαύλων).]¹²

So, the word that is used here is sometimes translated as zeal (usually a good thing) while at other times it is translated as rivalry, or jealousy. Of course, in our context Paul is discussing the works of the flesh, so it is clear that he is using the word with the negative connotation.

As Paul is becoming more specific once again, this word tends to reveal the reason that brethren might have hatred in their hearts for others, and why they might be creating strife: they are jealous of their brethren! Rather than seeing the good things in their brethren and being stirred to

¹¹ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

¹² Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti 1889* : 271. Print.

love and good works themselves, they are jealous of what their brethren are able to do or to have. Jealousy can be a great motivator! It can bring people to act in ways that they would never consider if they weren't being manipulated by jealousy!

Outbursts of Wrath

How else might these jealousies be made manifest? Paul continues his list with the idea of having outbursts of wrath. The word that he used here is:

θυμός [thumos /thoo-mos/] n m. From 2380; TDNT 3:167; TDNTA 339; GK 2596; 18 occurrences; AV translates as "wrath" 15 times, "fierceness" twice, and "indignation" once. 1 passion, angry, heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again. 2 glow, ardour, the wine of passion, inflaming wine (which either drives the drinker mad or kills him with its strength).¹³

This condemnation describes the one who "explodes" in anger against someone else, and then calms down. This person seems to get over what ever caused the initial boiling over, and then seems to be fine. The problem (besides the mere fact that God is condemning such lack of self control) is that this person does not consider the harm that he does when he has such a boiling over. When he allows his temper to be expressed on others, he doesn't consider the destruction he leaves behind him. While he thinks everything is back to normal, and his outburst is nothing, he can damage his brethren and his family in ways that can take a great amount of time to overcome!

In our society, we have little colloquial phrases that minimize the perception of this problem. "He lost his temper." "He flew off the handle." The idea is usually that it is a brief expression of temper or anger (rage) that passes and then the person returns to "normal." We even have a medical condition that used to be called "uncontrollable rage syndrome (or disorder)." Now it is known as "intermittent explosive disorder." By assigning it as a disorder, all responsibility is removed from the individual. "It's not my fault...I have a disorder!" But, we learn from Paul's instructions here that we are responsible for our own actions. It is not "uncontrollable", else Paul would not tell us that we should abstain from it! By telling us that we shouldn't participate, he is telling us that our actions are controllable! Such outbursts of wrath are not acceptable to God, and it is our responsibility to exercise self control!

Selfish Ambitions

This term, as well as the next, were taken from the political arena. They carry with them the same negative connotation as the previous condemned practices.

ἐριθεία [eritheia /er-ith-i-ah/] n f. Perhaps as the same as 2042; TDNT 2:660; TDNTA 256; GK 2249; Seven occurrences; AV translates as "strife" five times, "contention" once, and "contentious + 1537" once. 1 electioneering or intriguing for office. 1A apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts. 1B partisanship, fractiousness. Additional Information: This word is found before NT times only in Aristotle where it denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. (A&G) Paul exhorts to be one in the mind of Christ not putting self forward or being selfish (Phil 2:3). James 3:14 speaks against having selfishness or self-promoting in your heart.¹⁴

As has been discussed previously, many problems found within the church can be traced to individuals who are more concerned about self than they are with others. They have put themselves at the middle of everything, instead of Christ. This term takes that self-centered attitude to a different

¹³ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

¹⁴ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

level. This word has to do with campaigning for one's self. So, not only is this person determined to put their own desires first, they are going to campaign among the others to try and draw support for their way of thinking, or to achieve the position they desire. Unfortunately, we do see this type of mindset among some who want what they perceive to be position of great power in the local body. They campaign, hoping to garner enough votes to achieve their purpose.

Christians need to be reminded that they have the responsibility to serve others. No matter what position they might find themselves in, they are servants. Elders, for example, are to be the highest form of servitude to the local church. It is not a position of power, where men get to decide the fate of a congregation, but rather a position God has placed in the church for serving all, and helping them to achieve the eternal reward of heaven!

Dissensions

The word that Paul used here is translated as dissensions, or seditions. The word was originally used with regard to a political revolt. It is defined as:

σχίσμαβ, τος η; διχοστασία, ας f: a division into opposing groups, generally two—'division, discord.'

σχίσμαβ: σχίσμα οὖν ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ δι' αὐτόν 'so there came a division in the crowd because of him' Jn 7:43.

διχοστασία: σκοπεῖν τοὺς τὰς διχοστασίας ... ποιοῦντας 'watch out for people who cause divisions' Ro 16:17.

In some languages the equivalent of 'causing division' is literally 'to cause two groups in place of one group,' but more frequently the equivalent is expressed in terms of attitudes, for example, 'to cause people to be angry at one another' or 'to cause people not to like one another' or 'to cause people to think of one another as enemies.'¹⁵

This is the natural conclusion of a person campaigning for himself, or his desires. It causes divisions among the brethren. If there are at least two men who are determined to act in such a way, it is inevitable that they will divide the congregation behind themselves, and cause discord. This is the very idea that Paul was condemning when writing to the Corinthians brethren:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. (1 Corinthians 1:10–17)

Rather than trying to rally people around various men, everyone is supposed to rally around the Lord. When there are matters of judgment that are under consideration, the Christian is never to be self-centered, demanding that things be done his way. Certainly, he is not to begin campaigning for his own desires, to the detriment of the local body. Why would anyone cause such division, even if it does not result in complete physical split? The very act of encouraging this discord is condemned by Paul, and is not indicative of one who is truly working to follow and serve the Lord. This is not

¹⁵ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 493. Print.

what a true Christian looks like! While Christians often do not think of their actions as ‘political’, that is exactly what they end up being.

Heresies

While the previous word leaves the implication that there are divisions forming between brethren, they were not necessarily physically separated yet. This word takes the divisions to that next level.

αἵρεσις [haireisis /hah-ee-res-is/] n f. From 138; TDNT 1:180; TDNTA 27; GK 146; Nine occurrences; AV translates as “sect” five times, and “heresy” four times. 1 act of taking, capture: e.g. storming a city. 2 choosing, choice. 3 that which is chosen. 4 a body of men following their own tenets (sect or party). 4A of the Sadducees. 4B of the Pharisees. 4C of the Christians. 5 dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.¹⁶

This is the word that was used to identify the different sects of the Jews. It emphasizes the creation of actual divisions in the group. Those who would work to cause these divisions would be incapable of entering into the kingdom of God.

It is interesting that this is the same concept that is encapsulated in denominationalism. So many people think that the act of “dividing off” is inconsequential. They believe they can a part of whatever division they choose, and God is required to accept them. Here, the inspired writer shows that those who are divided off of whatever is the true group cannot inherit the kingdom of God! The declaration that “one church is as good as another” or that “all roads lead to heaven” stand in direct conflict with the writing of the inspired writer. We cannot believe that choosing to accept division as acceptable to God is true, when He, through His inspired writer, declared just the opposite!

By condemning the practice of division, we are being shown that we can have agreement, and we can have unity. That agreement and unity must be based on the only source of authority we have: God’s inspired word. When someone declares that God is happy with all of the division we see in the religious world, or tells us that we can take pride in all of the “Christian” religions, we can dismiss them as false prophets and teachers!

Envy

Once again, we can note the progression of ideas as Paul continues through these terms. If there are those who are campaigning for their own position or practice, it will most likely lead to the kind of divisions that Paul condemned. But, it will also instill envy between people. Earlier, we saw a condemnation against *jealousies*, and this word has some similarities. While that word could have either a good or bad connotation based on its context, this word was always used in a negative manner.

φθόνος, ου m: a state of ill will toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage experienced by such a person—‘envy, jealousy.’ τινές μὲν καὶ διὰ φθόνον καὶ ἔριν ... τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσουσιν ‘some people ... preach Christ ... because of envy and rivalry’ Php 1:15. Expressions for ‘envy’ or ‘jealousy’ are often idiomatic, for example, ‘the heart burns’ or ‘the stomach is hot.’¹⁷

When there is an attitude of ‘me first’ among people, which leads to campaigning for position in the group, it is easy to see how this type of envy can stirred up among people. Envy can be destructive to people, to relationships, to families. Envy causes people to respond in ways they would never otherwise consider. Envy makes people think they are being cheated, or not receiving what they

¹⁶ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

¹⁷ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains 1996* : 759. Print.

deserve. So, like most of the rest of the sins we have been examining, envy is the result of people being very self centered!

Murders

While this word appears in some manuscripts, but not in others, it is certainly one that fits with the theme Paul has established. It is a possible escalation of the digression that Paul has been writing about. Certainly, not all who become envious go on to murder, but this emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. All of these sinful practices begin with a heart problem:

So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man." (Matthew 15:16–20)

Once the heart is turned away from God, there is no real end to the path of wickedness that men can and do walk down. While this might seem like an extreme conclusion, it is certainly one that has been employed throughout history!

Drunkness

Paul's next set of words address intemperance. Paul first condemns the practice of drunkness. This word means:

88.283 μεθύωα; μέθη, ης f: to become drunk on alcoholic beverages—'to be drunk, drunkness.'

μεθύωα: οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε οὗτοι μεθύουσιν 'these men are not drunk as you suppose' Ac 2:15.

μέθη: ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κώμοις καὶ μέθαις 'let us conduct ourselves properly as people who live in the light of day; no orgies, no drunkness' Ro 13:13.¹⁸

The idea here is being completely intoxicated. It can also be used of other intoxicants than just alcohol:

μέθη [methe /meth-ay/] n f. Apparently a root word; TDNT 4:545; TDNTA 576; GK 3494; Three occurrences; AV translates as "drunkness" three times. 1 intoxication. 2 drunkness.¹⁹

This is a sin that many people today never even think about. In fact, many who claim to be Christians think nothing of becoming drunk. It is nothing more than a "good time" or a "fun weekend." Drunkness can also become an escape during difficult times. When things are not going the way a person likes, they turn to alcohol or other drugs, and allow their effects to provide an escape from reality.

Including drunkness in this list makes it clear that Paul condemned the practice, and there is no room to accept that it is inconsequential. Continuing in drunkness will keep one out of the kingdom of Heaven! It does not matter that this is something that is accepted as a part of society. It is not accepted by God!

God expects for Christians to be sober minded. There is no room for using such things as alcohol to diminish our cognitive abilities. Like many of the other sins we've seen, drunkness is the result of selfishness!

¹⁸ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 772. Print.

¹⁹ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* 1995 : n. pag. Print.

Revelries

While most of Paul's lists thus far have gone from broad to specific, or from lesser to greater, this one works backwards. Most Christians would say that drunkenness is wrong, but a little bit of drinking is not. However, the very point that Paul is making here is that participating in this type of social drinking, or partying is just as wrong as drunkenness. This term included all of the partying or entertainment that went along with this type of drinking party. We can compare the application of the word to the typical office party around a holiday in our society to get a picture of what Paul was condemning. Peter makes it clear that any level of drinking is condemned:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:1–3)

Peter lists 3 levels of intoxication: drunkenness, revelries and drinking parties. Here, the term that is translated as drinking party means:

πίτος [potos, poton /pot-os/] n m. From the alternate of 4095; TDNT 6:145; TDNTA 841; GK 4542; AV translates as “banqueting” once. 1 a drinking, carousing.²⁰

So, we can see the practice of complete intoxication condemned (drunkenness). We can also see the partying, including social drinking, that may or may not lead to that complete intoxication also condemned (revelries). And finally, we can see the practice of drinking alcohol condemned (drinking parties). Two of these words would include the idea of “social drinking” that seems to be so readily accepted today, and yet both are condemned by God. Alcohol, used in a way to alter the mind, is condemned by God. While many try to discover some loophole to justify their practices, the Bible condemns its use!

And the like...

Paul closed his list with a phrase that made it clear that he was not trying to identify every sin that would keep a person out of the kingdom of heaven. While many people will insist that their particular sin is not specified, and therefore acceptable for them to practice, Paul's closing phrase makes it evident that this is not the case. If there is anything else like these sins, then stay away from them!

We have pointed out throughout this study that these sins come down to selfishness. Often people try to justify their actions by saying things such as “the Bible doesn't specifically say not to!” This reflects the selfishness of heart that leads people into sin. Instead of trying to figure out what actions please God, we try to figure out what pleases us, and then justify those things before God. We think that God must accept whatever we offer Him. This is simply not the case. Here, Paul made it clear that participating in any of these sins, or anything that was like these sins, would keep people out of the kingdom of Heaven. There will be no negotiating at the gates of Heaven! We aren't going to get to argue with God over whether something we insisted was “just fine” is actually acceptable to Him. Instead of seeking to please ourselves, we must seek to please the Lord!

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:31–33)

²⁰ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

Questions...

1. What contrast did Paul establish between the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 5:26?
2. Paul said, “the works of the flesh are evident...” What did he mean by this? How are these works of the flesh evident?
3. What categories of sins are addressed by Paul in Galatians 5:19-21? What significance might there be to these categories?
4. What character flaw is found at the center of these (and all other) sinful behaviors?
5. What sins from Paul’s list are readily accepted by the world around us?
6. Which sins from Paul’s list have become accepted by many religious people, and even those in the church?
7. What did Paul say was the consequence for those who “practice such things” as he had addressed in this context? Does the teachings of most “Christian” churches agree with Paul’s assessment here?