

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH Galatians 5:19-23

In the Early Church in the book of Acts, there was a problem: the church were experiencing some **growing pains numerically**. The apostles were trying to do too much and didn't have enough time to devote themselves to the Word and to prayer because they were so busy serving tables. The answer they decided on was to appoint seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom whom they prayed over and entrusted this task too. Because of this wise decision, the church problem was fixed and the results are described in Acts 6:7, "The word of God kept on spreading and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly." The church had a problem that was keeping it from progressing and was causing disputes; they addressed the problem wisely, and as a result, it continued to grow and disciples continued to be made. And Paul found himself in a similar situation in Galatia where they were experiencing **growing pains spiritually**. The problem of legalism was keeping the church from progressing in their spiritual walk and becoming more Christlike. In Galatians, Paul's addressing the problem so the church will continue to grow and make disciples and glorify God, but right now its stuck. Paul was just as concerned about their growth as he was their salvation. Describing himself as a mother to them, he said he was in labor over these believers again until Christ was formed in them (4:20).

We are in Galatians 5 right now which means that we are in the practical portion of the book, a portion that we are refusing to rush through. If you have missed any of the messages from this chapter, I highly recommend going back and listening to them because having listened to all of the doctrinal teaching from the previous chapters, it's essential that we know how to apply it. Paul has mainly defended his apostleship in chapters 1 and 2 so that he could defend the message of the gospel he preaches in chapters 3 and 4, and now he's explaining what it looks like to live out the doctrines discussed. What's the point of taking in a bunch of knowledge if you're not going to apply it? There is so much in verses 16-26 of chapter 5, that we're going to spend a few weeks there, studying what it means to walk by the Spirit. It's one of the most critical portions of Scripture in regards to how we are to live and order our steps in the Christian life – so important and so full of implications for us that we just couldn't quite cover it all last week. Last week we went through the whole passage and really looked at the structure of it and were introduced to a general formula for walking by the Spirit but now I want to go back through and look further into the contrast being made between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. To be honest, I'd rather just focus on the fruit of the Spirit and skip studying the works of the flesh, but we really need to know the works of the flesh as well so we can pinpoint when we are operating by the sin nature.

So far in chapter 5, Paul has stated **TWO NEGATIVES** in regards to the Christian life: #1, Christians are called to freedom from *legalism* and it is not to be renounced – "Keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (5:1)," and #2, just because we're not under Law does not mean we can go to the opposite extreme of *license* where Christian freedom is abused – "Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (5:13)." And this a genius freedom of God because both of those two errors, legalism and license, are forms of slavery. If you're living under the works of the Law, you're a slave. If you're living by the sin nature, you're also a slave. A lot of people think that by rejecting God and rejecting morals, that they're free to live in sin and they can't see that **there's nothing free about the living in sin**. You're an addict if you live in sin. Jesus said, "everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). Legalism and license are both forms of slavery to the flesh.

So the questions is deducted: if Christian progress (growing spiritually, sanctification), is NOT by legalism and NOT by passively accepting license (accept our sinful state), then, "What is it? What is this freedom and how is it attained? By what fundamental principle should we order our steps to overcome the flesh with

its lust and anger and depression and divisiveness?” Because the sin nature isn’t going anywhere until death or rapture – it’s inescapable until then (when we’re glorified) – so we’d better learn how to deal with it and have victory over it. If it’s not to an external law of commands and it’s not passively forfeiting to the law of sin, then how should we live our lives? How do we find freedom? With it, joy, identity and purposeful meaning in this life? People are desperate for these things. The answer, rooted in the gospel, is: “Walk by the Spirit.” Paul’s **POSITIVE DIRECTION** to us, contrasting the negatives, is that we be freed from both of those two errors by **continually walking by the Spirit**.

There’s a battle going on inside everyone who has put their faith in Christ. All believers have a sinful nature and a divine nature and these two natures are at war, pulling the believer in opposite directions. A lot of people don’t like the battle within that we experience between the sin nature and the divine nature or the flesh and Spirit, and they want to run from it and escape it permanently through some drastic measures because sometimes it just seems like too much, but we can’t let ourselves sink into that mindset. We need to remember that this war we experience on the inside is meaningful, teaching us and growing us into the likeness of our Savior. There’s two lists in our passage and the first (the one I don’t want to spend as much time on and almost want to skip over), is the list of vices, or the works of the flesh and deeds of the flesh. Paul gives sort of a preview of what it looks like when someone’s living by the flesh. It’s evident.

I. THE WORKS OF THE FLESH ARE EVIDENT. (VV. 19-21)

It’s obvious. Just as can tell what kind of tree it is by its fruit, so you can tell whether you’re walking by the flesh or the Spirit by what your life is producing at any given moment.

❖ **It doesn’t necessarily mean these are even public because some aren’t actions, but attitudes. (they can be inward or outward)** – why I like to call them works instead of deeds.

The first three works of the flesh are in the category of **sexual sins**:

A. Immorality (porneia)

Specifically, he’s referring to sexual immorality and is basically any practice of outside the covenant bond of marriage between one man and one woman.

B. Impurity (akatharsia)

This word means “unclean” and reminds us of the ceremonial laws and purity that was required to approach God in the Law. It can refer to an uncleanness in word, thought, or deed. As believers we should use clean words (Eph. 5:4), desire a clean conscience (1 Peter 3:21) and be clean in our actions (Jude 23).

C. Sensuality (aselgeia)

This is referring to licentiousness, sexual indulgence that is unrestrained and without shame, without fear of God and without public decency. It’s referring to sin that isn’t hidden, but promoted, flaunted and boasted of, just like the LGBTQ Pride movement going on today. It’s something that used to be considered shameful and hidden but is now paraded down our streets and celebrated. It reminds me of Romans 1, which is like reading a newspaper or a brief history of the U.S., describes the devolution of man, which describes in detail the poor spiritual season we’re in as a nation. When man rejects God, Romans 1 says He abandons them (the wrath of divine abandonment) to their own sin and the consequences of it. Romans 1:24-25 says God gives men over to the impure lust of their hearts, (like the sexual revolution in the 60’s). Following that, He then gives them over to further degrading passions where they exchange that which is natural for that which is unnatural (homosexuality of the 80’s) – and they receive in their persons the due penalty of their error (vv. 26-27). Then following that, because they don’t want to do anything proper – don’t want to acknowledge God anymore or give Him thanks – and they not only practice abominations but give hearty approval of it, it says He gives man over to a

depraved mind (vv. 28-32). If it seems to you like people are losing their minds today, running headlong into sin that destroys their lives, you're right on track with Romans 1 because it says that's exactly what happens when men reject God.

The next couple of flesh-driven works are considered **religious** sins.

D. Idolatry (eidololatria)

The practice of worshipping or serving idols, false gods. The word literally means "idol service" and out of the 3 times it's listed in the NT, it is listed right beside sorcery. The two tend to go hand in hand, as there is demonic powers behind the idol worship in the world. My mind always goes to India and all of the countless gods they have fashioned with their hands. But anything or anyone we place above God in our lives can be an idol. If you want to know what the idols are in your life, they say just look at how you spend your free time and money.

E. Sorcery (pharmakeia)

Sorcery comes from the word "pharmakeia" which many commentators were quick to point out is where we get our word for pharmacy or pharmaceuticals. Occult practices like witchcraft often use drugs in connection with it. There's a link between drugs and the demonic world – loosening your mind and your control makes more susceptible and open to the dark world and I've heard from more than one person who used to do drugs that that was the case. It exposes you to the demonic world. Sorcerers are guilty of aiding the evil spiritual world.¹ Drugs make you lose control, but the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

The remaining flesh-driven works are more **relational** and are the majority of the works, which tells us God cares a lot about community and our relationships.

F. Enmity (echthra)

Often translated as hatred, it is referring to a lack of peace between people. People at war with each other instead of peace. It's the opposite of loving each other. Many people are just hateful all the time, I even used to know a guy whose nickname was "hateful". It didn't matter who or what it was, there was something to hate about them or hate about it. He always talked about how when he was going to retire he was going to get a cabin and just escape everyone and everything and that's what he did.

G. Strife (eris)

Strife is translated from the word "eris" and is enmity in action, referring to quarrels and conflicts. In early Greek mythology, Eris is a goddess who destroys community by instigating war and destruction.²

H. Jealousy (zelos)

The word jealousy comes from the "zelos", where we get the word "zeal". We can be zealous in a good or bad sense, for good or bad desire. James 4:5, for example, says that God, "jealously desires the Spirit He has made to dwell in us." That's a good jealousy. But the jealousy of the flesh isn't good – it's coveting and resentful, creates rivalry and competition. It's produced by a lack of contentment with what you already have and what God has given you.

I. Outbursts of anger (thymos)

When we explode on someone or something, that's a definite work of the flesh. It's the result of a short fuse, right? Being impulsive. By God's grace, the Spirit lengthens our fuses and we can **respond** rightly, rather than **react** with an outburst of anger. There is a way to be angry without sinning.

J. Disputes (eritheia)

Has in mind selfish ambition or self-promotion - fighting your way to the top.

K. Dissensions (dichostasiai)

Hostility, creating discord and division. God wants us to be in unity and to be diligent about preserving the unity of the Spirit, not divided.

L. Factions (haireisis)

This word is where we get our word “heresies” from, strange teachings that cause division in the church. Cliques and sects that develop within the body are of the flesh.

M. Envy (phthonoi)

A lot like jealousy, desiring what other have and doesn't like to see others prosper.

N. Drunkenness (methai)

Excessive indulgence with alcohol. Too much alcohol can weaken a person's control and makes them more susceptible to doing all the other works of the flesh.

O. Carousing (komoi)

This likely has to do with the unrestrained revelry that was associated with pagan worship ceremonies and boisterous or crude behavior.

P. And “things like these”

He means that this is not an exhaustive list of the works of the flesh. There's more, but we get the point. These works of the flesh are not God's will for your life. God hates these things. One of the reasons why is because they destroy His good creation that He loves, they ruin your life and make you miserable. They destroy community and unity. If you want to support any of these, like in some gay pride parade, you're supporting the flesh and supporting to make peoples' lives miserable now and in eternity.

- ❖ **And Paul's warning again, that I'm not ashamed to repeat, is that those who habitually practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** He's saying examine yourself! See whether or not you're in the faith. See whether or not you belong to Christ. Those who practice the works of the flesh habitually give evidence of the fact that they might not be saved at all and might not really sons of God and not heirs. He's not trying to create doubt, but to get rid of the complacency and moral laxity. There should be progress in your life. **If there's no war in you – if you just go on sinning and carry out these desires of the flesh willingly and habitually and you don't feel anything, you have reason to question whether you've got the Spirit of God in you to begin with. A warning like this isn't anything to mess around with.** Again, this doesn't mean that you have to be perfect or that we won't sometimes sin – if we say we have no sin, we're liars (1 John 1:8), and if we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 1:9) – but the key word is the word “**practice**”. 1 John 3:9 says, “No one who is born of God **practices** sin, because His seed abides in him.” One of the first signs that you've been saved and have God's Spirit is that you begin to be grieved by the sinful things you used to do with no problem.

They're also considered the **unfruitful deeds of darkness** in Ephesians 5:11. Practicing them makes you unfruitful for God. If you really are a believer and you're dominated by the flesh (and a believer living by the flesh is capable of all of these), you're going to miss out on rewards too so you won't inherit the kingdom of God in the sense of rewards. You might get in by the skin of your teeth, but you're going to suffer loss. You will not hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” but shrink away in shame. 2 Peter 1 says if we want **fruitful** and **useful**, have **confidence** in our salvation and receive an **abundant entrance into heaven**, we've got to walk by the Spirit and add qualities to our faith like moral excellence and self-control and knowledge and kindness and love.

It's the ultimate answer for all of these fleshly problems that we face in life like anger and lust and hate and addictions and jealousy. It isn't going to be found anywhere other than in Christ. The ultimate reason why you're angry or hateful isn't just because of some traumatic event when you were a kid like psychology might tell you – but because of your sin nature and living in sin. Psychology might be able to reveal some things but it can't give you the answer you need. It's beyond a self-help technique. You can't do it by yourself. You need Christ. Don't look to yourself and focus on yourself. Look at what you produce! You produce filthy rags, even at your best moment Isaiah says. Your righteous deeds to earn God's favor are menstrual rags! Instead, look to Christ! Look to Him and be saved, all your ends of the earth! Everybody can look. It's not that hard is it? If you want to be saved, look to Christ! If you want to grow, look to Christ and to His Spirit! The answers are in Christ. If you struggle with **hate**, the fruit of the Spirit is **love**. If you struggle with **anxiety**, the fruit of the Spirit is **peace**. **Depression**? The fruit of the Spirit is **joy**. **Anxious**? The fruit of the Spirit is patience. **Inconsistency**? The Spirit brings **faithfulness**. The answer to our problems is a dependent walk with God, walk by the Spirit.

Last week, I gave four principles to walk by the Spirit today I basically want to revisit the first two. **Two provisions** and both are seen in Romans 13:14: “but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.” The Christian life is a life of provision. Overcoming the flesh requires us to first...

II. PUT ON THE PROVISION OF YOUR UNION WITH CHRIST. (VV. 24, 25)

Understand who you are in Christ and put Him on. Unless you understand your identity in Christ and your union with Him, you won't be able to live the way a child of God is encouraged to live. We talked about this last week when we were discussing the relationship between imperatives and indicatives – **commands resting on the foundation of spiritual realities**. We can **walk** by the Spirit because we **live** by the Spirit. Because we have died and been raised up with Christ, we are to keep seeking the things above. It's because we've been crucified with Christ that we can now crucify the deeds of the flesh by walking by the Spirit. In Romans 8:13 Paul said, “If you're living according to the flesh, you must die.” I think he's talking about our co-crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension with Christ through the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit explained in Romans 6 that must be appropriated if we're going to live consistently victorious. “How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been **baptized into His death**? Therefore we have been **buried** with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was **raised** from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the **newness of life**. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His **death**, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His **resurrection**, knowing this, that **our old self was crucified with Him**, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has **died** is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so **consider [reckon, appropriate by faith]** yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you for you are not under Law but under grace.” This is not taking merely about some water baptism, but Spirit baptism, what water baptism symbolizes. When the Spirit baptizes us, we are placed into Christ and are in union with Him. He's not only the Spirit of life but the Spirit of death (Wiersbe). Our old self was crucified with Him and our sin nature is no longer to dominate because the Spirit in us is stronger and

has freed us from that domination. This spiritual gospel reality being appropriated by faith is such a key basis to victory and yet so many don't get it or pass it up because it's foolishness

We always dress for the occasion, don't we? If you go to work you put work clothes on. Railroaders might put on their orange vest, safety protection, steel toe boots. Nurses and doctors put on their scrubs. If you go hunting, you wear camo. If you go on a run to exercise, you put on shorts and sneakers. You dress for the occasion. And believers, who are in a war, are to dress for the occasion too. We are to put on Christ. When you're tempted to sin, put on Christ – I'm dead to sin and alive to God for righteousness. I'd rather glorify God than gratify my flesh and give Satan some reason to accuse us. That's where it starts: **a worshipful, faith based thought life**. Christianity is the thinking man's religion. As a man thinks within himself, so he is (Prov. 23:7). Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:1-2). If you just try to **suppress** your fleshly thoughts, you'll struggle. Like the Law simply stirring up the dust in Pilgrim's Progress – makes things worse for Christian. "Do not covet" produced coveting.

❖ **We need to learn to redirect our thought life to Christ and our identity and union with Him.**

Take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. It's not mere mental exercises, this is worship and operating by faith. Ironside said, "I can't help it if a bird lands on my head, but I can help it if it builds a nest there. Point being, you may not be able to stop some of the thoughts that come into your head, but you can help from indulging in those thoughts."³ You may not be able to stop a river from flowing, but you can build a dam to direct it elsewhere.

But there's also some action you can take beforehand to keep the bird from landing on your head so often – some practical preventative maintenance. We can...

III. **PUT OFF PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FLESH (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 13:14)**

Galatians 5:13 says, "do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh." And Romans 13:14 says, "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." If you want a rose bush or a grape vine to bear more fruit, sometimes you have to trim it up. Sometimes you have to trim things out of your life that feed the flesh. John 15:2 says, "every branch that bears fruit, He prunes so that it may bear more fruit." Even the Father trims us up so that we bear more fruit. Lesson: don't provide the flesh with any **unnecessary opportunities** through which it will be enticed and manifest itself. **And don't think that by giving your flesh an opportunity it will be satisfied, because it will just crave it more and more. It's never satisfied.** It'll ask for a little bit more. On top of that, you'll be **grieved**, because you go against the Spirit's desire and grieve Him.

We can be more careful about the things we expose ourselves too. David said, "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes" (Ps. 101:3). Sometimes you have to clean house, and get the things you struggle with out of your home. Making provision for the flesh is like leaving a fork sitting next to the cake on your kitchen counter when you're trying to lose weight, or leaving a full candy dish on the end table by your recliner. That's just not wise. This isn't complicated. If there is certain temptation that we know we are especially prone to falling into, we should do all that we can to avoid it. **WHEN** will you be tempted? Prepare yourself for those times, maybe text some friends for accountability and ask them to check in during that time. **WHERE** will you be tempted? Is there a particular place that often is harder? Don't go there. Be wise. Use common sense and take it seriously. Jesus talked about cutting off your right hand or plucking out your eye if they're causing you to sin. He wasn't being literal, but saying that sometimes forsaking a besetting sin requires drastic measures.

❖ **We need to learn to redirect our actions (as well as our thought life) by reducing obvious obstacles ahead of time. Get anything out of the path that's going to trip up your walk.**

Paul told thieves to stop stealing and start working – they wouldn't be tempted to steal if they had money and could also give to the Lord's work. **Replace sinful or tempting times with Christian**

disciplines like reading your Bible, praying, meeting with a friend for fellowship or accountability. Get a fellow Christian soldier you trust to help you battle it out.

It's hard work to walk with God. It's a privilege. There's nothing special about walking by the flesh – anyone can do that. But to walk with God, that's special in this world. That's worship. God is glorified by those who walk by the Spirit. "My Father is glorified by this: that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples," (Jn. 15:8). Next week we focus on the fruit of the Spirit.

¹ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Galatians*: 2019 edition, accessed 27 June 2019, www.planobiblechapel.org.

² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*: New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1982; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eedmans Publishing, 1983),

³ Harry A. Ironside, *Expository Message on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Reprint ed. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1975), 207.