

Galatians 5:19-21

Gal 5:19 (NKJV) **Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,²¹ 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.**

In this study, we will begin to look in more detail at some of the other observations that we have made concerning this passage. The third observation was that this listing in v19-21 is only a partial listing of the sins that are “**works of the flesh**”. These sins and others like them are not sins that we can blame of other people, on our culture, on the devil, or on the world and all of its influences. Obviously the influence of those elements certainly contributes to and entices the flesh in an ungodly direction, but still these are all sins for which we as believers have to take full responsibility. We cannot do as Adam and Eve did in the garden and just casually “pass the buck” on to someone or something else. It is the idea that everytime that something goes wrong in my life that I simply cannot be blaming other people and making excuses for things that are clearly my fault and of my own undoing.

In v21 Paul uses the little phrase “**and the like**” to identify that these seventeen evidences of sin are only a partial listing. I like the way that the NASB, ESV, and NSRV read – “**and things like these**”. The HCSB says “**and anything similar**”. The NLT says “**and other sins like these**”. The point that Paul is making is that this is not an exhaustive list. I am not sure that this is proper hermeneutically, but I think we could probably take those characteristics that are the opposite of the “**fruit of the Spirit**” - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and add them to this list. It would be things like being hateful towards others or always being despondent and gloomy about everything. It would be always finding ourselves living in anxiety, lacking tolerance, being impatient with people, being cruel and harsh towards people we do not like, having no mercy, lacking faithfulness, being disloyal, and having a complete lack of self-control. Then, we could add the additional sins that Jesus mentioned in [Mark 7:20-23](#) that are not in this list – “**evil thoughts, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness**”. Jesus clearly says in that passage that these things come “**from within**” and “**defile a man**”.

If we wanted to continue to define the list we could go to [Romans 1:18-31](#) and add the following: ungodliness, unrighteousness, suppressing the truth, not glorifying God, not being thankful, being futile in our thought life, changing the glory of God into something despicable, dishonoring our bodies, exchanging the truth of God for a lie, worshipping the creature more than the Creator, giving ourselves up to vile passions, morally doing what is against nature - women with women, men with men, committing shameful acts, not liking to retain God in our knowledge, being debased in thinking, malicious, generating strife, deceitful, evil-minded, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful, and approving of those who do such things. This is portion of Scripture in [Romans 1](#) is very ugly to say the least. Then to make it even worse, we have [Romans 3:10-18](#) which describes the lost man as being totally unprofitable. It says that their throat is an open tomb, that they do no good (no God good), that they practice deceit, that the poison of asps is under their lips, that they curse, they are bitter, swift to shed blood, and they have no fear of God. Certainly none of these is a

good listing of sins and every one of these descriptions of sin could easily fall under the category of the “**works of the flesh**”.

It should be crystal clear that there is no way that we can exhaust the innumerable ways in which sin can manifest itself in a person’s life. The kinds of sins that we all can commit, the way that sin can infect and destroy a person’s life and destroy entire families, the cruelty that sin can inflict on other people, and the inevitable excuses, rationalizations, justifications, and explanations as to why we personally do not have to take responsibility for our sins. These things are of such a magnitude that it almost defies explanation. We see people all the time that are hopelessly perverted, obsessed, and just utterly depraved with sin in their life. The sad part is that in many cases they have no desire to change and certainly no power to change.

Now, what we know with complete certainty is that if any of the attributes that we have just listed are in our life in some way, that what we are doing is the exact opposite of what God would want us to do – the exact opposite. [Galatians 5:17](#) clearly describes this when it says,

Gal 5:17 (NKJV) **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.**

What is important to understand in a verse like that is that if we are ever going to be able to truly live out the Christian life the way that God wants us to live it out, then we must begin to think as God thinks. If I can say it this way, we have to see this, we have to understand the flesh and the Spirit of God are always at odds with one another, and we will never get a respite from that reality. I wish that I could give you some kind of little formula that you could just plug into your life that gives you immediate relief from this real spiritual conflict – but I cannot because it does not exist. The spiritual battle, the constant confrontation of the flesh with the Spirit is not something that will go away. Listen very carefully because this is an important principle to glean from this. **We are always in a spiritual battle to CHOOSE to do what God truly wants us to do.** I am always being called on to make choices. The Holy Spirit is always prompting me to make the right choice. The flesh is always prompting me to make the wrong choice. So, if we are not willing to think the way that God thinks, literally about everything in our life and every area of our life – our speech, our goals, our attitudes, our time, our resources, etc., then we will never have the power to do the right thing or the godly thing.

I am afraid that we have become experts in how to rationalize away our personal responsibility and our personal accountability when it comes to the bad decisions and choices that we make. Way too often we are not willing to take the blame for our actions, not willing to impugn ourselves when we have failed in an area of our life. Listen, this is a very long listing of sins of which the flesh is more than capable of producing in our lives, but it is especially long if we always find reasons as to why we are not willing to simply to take the blame for our bad choices – for what we did, for what we said, for how we said it, for what we did not do, but should have done. We find creative ways to deflect the blame that we deserve on other people, on our circumstances, on being tired, on being stressed out, on being over-worked, on being mistreated, on being unappreciated – the list is endless. We know how to transfer the blame for our actions to someone else or something else. Do you want to know what that is? It is what Paul defines here as the “**works of the flesh**” – that is what all of that is. Passing the blame on to someone else is another one of the “**works of the flesh**”. I can assure you that it is what got Adam into trouble. I have

always wondered how God would have dealt with Adam if he had simply taken full responsibility for his disobedient choice and immediately confessed that disobedience. He blamed it on his wife and his wife blamed it on the serpent, and from that point it all fell apart.

Now, here is a major lesson that we want to take away from this grueling list of sins that we have addressed. The lesson is that **none of these sinful attributes should characterize our life**. They may be present at different times (the snapshot vs. the motion picture) and we may certainly fail in one of these areas, but when someone looks at our life as a Christian, they should not be able to see these kinds of sinful activities and habits as a pattern and as a lifestyle in our life. Why is that? It is simply because we are God's children and are living under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. That is the nature of God's divine life having been imparted to us. We are being led by the Spirit, we are living in the Spirit, and the fruits of God's Spirit are being developed in our lives. We are NOT practicing these things in our life. These are not attributes that are controlling and dominating our life. We are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ in our life. Paul is very clear when he says without reservation that **"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"**. He says that because he knows that these are not attributes that characterize genuine believers. It should be said of us that we are not intentionally or willfully practicing any of these things in our life. We may not be fully mature in an area and we may not yet have full control of an area of our life, but we are NOT practicing these things in our life. You should be able to look at your life right now and know that that last phrase in v21 does not describe you, and therefore it does not represent you. From that one position alone, you should be able to walk away in full assurance of your salvation.

Our fourth observation was that Paul is communicating something to these Galatians that he had already communicated to them – **"just as I told you in time past"** (v21). Apparently Paul had seen some residual sins from their former life before they were saved beginning to possibly resurface, so he simply had addressed them previously. When I read this listing and the others that we have added to it, these are not areas that have to be well defined for us to understand simply because innately and intuitively we know what these **"works of the flesh"** are and how they manifest themselves in a person's life. We know what adultery is, we know what outbursts of anger are, we know what jealousy and hatred are, and we know what drunkenness is. These are words that have meaning to us because we see these kinds of works all the time and everywhere in people's lives, and may have at some point in our life repeatedly and habitually committed some of these very sins. The word **"told"** in v21 is the Greek word *"proereo"* and it literally means to say before. It is the idea of actually forewarning someone. Paul was not shy about forewarning people about their sin and the consequences of their sin. For instance in [2 Corinthians 13:1-2](#) he says this to the Corinthians because of their sinful behavior,

*2Co 13:1 (NKJV) This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." 2 **I have told you before**, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare--*

He had seen a great deal of sin in their congregation and he had spoken boldly against it when he did. I am a firm believer that if you really care about someone and you see obvious things in their life that are diametrically opposed to what God would have for their life, that in a loving and a caring way it is important to share those things with them. Being transparent with someone is not easy because

sometimes they may take offense to what you are saying about them, as well as the fact that they see things in your life that are outside of God's boundaries. So, they become defensive and even critical of you. I think this happens all the time in marriages because one partner knows so much about the other partner. So even though Paul was talking to a church in [2 Corinthians 13](#), he also understood the issue we are addressing because of what he says in [Galatians 6:1](#) when he is dealing with just an individual.

Gal 6:1 (NKJV) Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

If I can say it this way, you have to earn the right to be able to speak into someone's life. You cannot discern something that is wrong and then just barge into that person's life with your "constructive criticism". If someone does not want your opinion about their life, then most likely they will not receive anything that you may have to say to them – even if it is very correct and discerning. So, Paul says that you have to approach the person in a twofold way. The first is a spirit of restoration as opposed to a spirit that is tearing someone down. To the contrary, you want to actually try and build them up when you see something out of balance in their life. Then secondly, you have to go to them with a spirit of gentleness, a spirit of kindness – nothing harsh or overbearing. If you go to that person with a genuine spirit of gentleness, you have greatly increased the odds that they will receive your encouragement to them. One of the best ways to help them to be transparent with them is to identify when you may have failed in the same area and how God helped you to overcome that failure. At a personal level, I have a lot to share with people. Why is that? Well, it is simple. I have failed a lot and I have a lot of personal testimonies as to how God dealt with me and how He corrected and restored me in those areas of my life. I may have a lot more to share than you do because I have had a lot more time to actually fail.