

### Galatians 5:19-21

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

Our fifth observation was that there is a tremendous difference between someone who simply fails in one of these areas and someone who actually “**practices**” these things as a way of life. The word “**practices**” is the Greek word “*prasso*” and is a participle in the present tense, active voice. It simply means that the individual is performing these “**works of the flesh**” repeatedly, continually, and habitually. There is another Greek word “*poieo*” which means to do something just once, but “*prasso*” means that the individual continues to do the same thing as an ongoing habit of their life.<sup>1</sup> There are some of the translations which translate it as “**do**” (KJV, ESV, AMP, RSV, YLT, NRSV), but I personally believe that misses the point. The fact that it is in the present tense and active voice only strengthens the concept of the habitual nature of the word. Any believer can fail in any one of these areas, but that does not mean that they necessarily are failing habitually. So, this word is not speaking about the person who just simply fails, but the person who is addicted to some of these egregious sins as their typical and obvious lifestyle. I love the way that the word is characterized in [Philippians 4:9](#) in a good sense when it says,

**Php 4:9 (NKJV) The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**

It is the idea that we are to always be practicing and doing the right things and the godly things that God has taught us to do. Doing what is right and doing what is godly is to be the habit of our life, the continuing direction of our life. It is to be what always characterizes our life and it is something that should always be visible and evident to other people. [John 3:20](#) uses the word in a negative sense when it says,

**Jn 3:20 (NKJV) For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

That is a very, very strong indictment for someone to be continually and repeatedly practicing blatant and known sin in his or her life. God says that to do so means that the individual actually “**hates the light**”, hates the truth, and is not willing to come to the truth, and that alone is incredibly serious. At times it is very difficult to understand how wicked people can be so blatantly ungodly and shameless in living out their lives. There is no fear of God, no reverence for His Word, and not even any willingness to consider His truth. The bottom line is that lost people love sin and that propensity cannot be hidden.

The word “*prasso*” was actually a very formal word that was used to describe a deed that someone could do that could not stand up in court and was deserving of death.<sup>2</sup> That one attribute alone identifies the incredibly serious overtone that this word carries with it. So, as believers, we should be able to step

---

<sup>1</sup> Strong, 1329.

<sup>2</sup> Verbrugge, 487.

away from our life, make an honest assessment, and come to the sincere conclusion that we are not habitually engaged in the “**works of the flesh**”. Do we fail at times? Sure we do. At various times, we all will commit some “**works of the flesh**” in our life, and when that happens it should be something that we deeply regret and something that creates a sense of genuine remorse and repentance in us. I would say that it is inevitable that we will fail, but with the caveat that it should not be normal on a continuing basis. As ugly and as dirty as this picture of sin is in this passage, it really should be a great encouragement to us as believers that we truly are born again.

The sixth observation that we initially addressed was that those who habitually and continually “**practice**” and are engaged in these things as a way of life are not saved and “**will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (v21). The word for “**inherit**” is the Greek word “*kleronomeo*” and it means to become an heir and to obtain an inheritance. As the word is utilized in the New Testament it means that these individuals simply will not receive admission into or even enter into the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> It is just another way of saying that these kinds of people simply are not saved. Listen to how [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) says the same thing,

1Co 6:9 (NKJV) **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,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.**

It is not like God is keeping how someone actually enters into His kingdom as a secret, as a kind of spiritual hush-hush – not at all. There is nothing that is difficult to understand about these kinds of verses. The word “**inherit**” in [Galatians 5:21](#) is in the future tense, indicative mood which means that anyone who is continually and habitually practicing these kinds of activities in their life will not under any circumstances be allowed to enter into God’s kingdom in the future. The indicative mood means that what Paul is saying is an absolute fact, an absolute reality for these people. There is no wiggle room in verses like these. To the contrary, God has made the conditions upon which someone can enter or not enter into His kingdom to be crystal clear. There is no subtlety in these words, in these explanations of the conditions related to salvation. I think it is correct to say that these kinds of verses are not promoting the notion of a works based salvation, but are simply identifying that when these kinds of ongoing characteristics and attributes are obvious in a person’s life that that person simply is not saved.

Everybody has to stand at a spiritual crossroad at some time in their life. No one escapes. As God works in a person’s life and brings them to a place of conviction and unrest about their life and about their eternal destiny, at that point they are called on by God to make a decision regarding their life and how they are going to relate to God. The average person could be characterized as being totally indifferent, completely insensitive, entirely uncaring, and casually unresponsive to God’s Spirit and to God’s Word and work in their life. This unconcerned, unmoved, cold response to God seems to be much too normal for people. It is like their heart and mind have been cauterized to the gospel and to the truth and they have no interest and no inclination to even hear what God has said. The Scriptures boldly declare that the person who has said that there is no God is a fool.

---

<sup>3</sup> Zodhiates, 867.

In a very practical way of saying this, I would say that if a person, and especially those who regularly attend church, were to look back on their life and they cannot identify a time in their life where they know that they stood at this spiritual crossroad in their life and made a life-transforming decision that that individual simply has never been saved. Unfortunately, I think this happens all the time in churches with children who grow up in a Christian home and are eagerly urged on by their parents to make a “decision”. They say the prayer, get baptized, and attend church – but they were never truly saved. They just mechanically mimicked what their parents wanted them to do. Everybody has to intimately know that there was that actual moment in their life where they stood at that crossroad in their life and made that one choice that they needed to make and were truly saved. The way that they can know if it was a genuine decision that led to salvation is whether or not their life truly reflects a deep and abiding love for God, for Christ, for His Word, and for His church. The last thing that someone would ever want to happen is to wander through their life living under the illusion that they are saved, but there being no real evidence of it in their life. I have personally seen, and I think that the statistics prove this to be true, that the longer someone waits and puts off this very critical moment in their life, that the much greater are the odds that they will never really come to Christ. This is the greatest tragedy that could ever happen in a person’s life – to be constantly exposed to the gospel, to Christ, and to His Word and just indifferently and casually reject it as being completely unimportant to their life. When talking about this kind of thing I am always reminded of those incredibly frightening words that Jesus declared in [Matthew 7:21-23](#) when He said the following,

Mt 7:21 (NKJV) **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice (*ergazomai* – to work, to toil towards) lawlessness!"**

The seventh observation is that the “**works of the flesh**” are characteristics that can apply to either a saved person or a lost person. If they are evident in a true believer’s life, they cannot stay there. If they remain, then in all likelihood that person was never truly saved. We mentioned this in the initial study of these eight observations, but when we were saved, unfortunately nothing happened to our flesh. That would have been really nice, but it simply did not happen. However, what did happen is that God gave every believer the power and grace to “control” their fleshly appetites through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. [Galatians 5:24](#) says it this way,

Gal 5:24 (NKJV) **And those *who are* Christ's have crucified (*indicative mood, aorist tense*) the flesh with its passions and desires.**

Because it is in the indicative mood it means that it is an established fact, something that actually took place. Because it is in the aorist tense, it means that it is something that not only took place, but took place in the past at a specific point in time, and specifically in this context at the new birth.

Probably the most encouraging verse in the New Testament on this is [Galatians 2:20](#) which says,

Gal 2:20 (NKJV) **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.**

What this verse clearly teaches is that once the Christian life begins for someone, it continues by faith in what Christ is able to do in them. None of us are a prisoner to the flesh and its passions. They exist and they are very real and they have a way of raising their ugly head in our life at different times, but those “**sinful passions**” cannot control our life as we by faith yield ourselves to Christ. One thing that [Romans 6-7](#) teaches is that before salvation that we were what Paul describes as “**in the flesh**”. For instance, [Romans 7:5](#) says,

Ro 7:5 (NKJV) **For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.**

Paul says that “**we were in the flesh...**” His point in that verse is that before salvation that our life was controlled and dominated by these “**sinful passions**”. These passions and lusts were inevitable, unavoidable, predictable, normal, certain, and unescapable. We were individuals who were literally controlled by our fleshly desires, and part of that reality was an ongoing disdain and contempt for both God and His Word. A very revealing question that can always be asked of someone is this: “*Do you have any sincere interest in God’s Word and being with God’s people?*” Everyone knows if they truly have either of those desires. I am convinced that many people who attend church really do not want to be there. Why? It is because they have no true interest in God, in God’s Word, or in God’s church. They have other priorities, other concerns, and other urgencies – but not God. Anything but God and anywhere but church. You see, these kind of subtle questions are really very revealing if people would genuinely be honest in answering them. However, the tragic reality is that an honest answer would most likely reveal that they may not even be saved.

However, what we find later on in [Romans](#) is that at the moment of salvation that there was a strategic and life-transforming change that took place. It was just as certain of a moment as was our physical birth, and at that moment God created a deep spiritual change in our life. This is not something that the new believer did – never. This is something that God did, something that God initiated, and something that God created. [Romans 8:9](#) speaks of that moment when it says,

Ro 8:9 (NKJV) **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**

Once the Spirit of God indwells a person, everything changes. At that moment we go from being “**in the flesh**” to being “**in the Spirit**”. That change was not a guarantee that there would never be any conflict with the flesh, but a guarantee that the flesh would no longer rule over and control our life. It was a guarantee that our heart and mind would see life very differently. It was a guarantee that our life would now be influenced and controlled by godly impulses rather than fleshly impulses. This is exactly what it means to be born again, to be “**in the Spirit**”. There is no escaping this reality. Unfortunately, the modern church culture is more than comfortable with giving people a warm fuzzy feeling about their salvation even though there may be no evidence of it and no hunger whatsoever for the Word of God. It is so unfortunate and heart-rending to watch young people leave home and lose all interest in the things of God. All it reveals is that they never had it to begin with, and that is why their supposed Christian life was no longer sustainable. It was just a false and meaningless spiritual charade.

The final observation is that Paul is using this passage to contrast the differences between the “**fruit of Spirit**” and “**the works of the flesh**”. If I can say it another way, he is contrasting the differences

between spiritual life and spiritual death. He is contrasting the differences between someone who is saved and someone who is lost. What has to be gleaned from a passage like this is that the differences and distinctions between the two are so radically different that there could never be any question about the differences. The differences between the “**fruit of the Spirit**” and the “**works of the flesh**” are so evident that a blind person could see the differences. There is absolutely nothing, not one single thing that is similar or compatible with the other. I am often times staggered at how casual the modern church treats these issues. It is almost as if it possesses a total lack of discernment in this area and embraces anyone for any reason. We are not against people. We are not a lost person’s enemy. To the contrary, it is our understanding of and obedience to the truth, as well as our love for the lost that provides us a platform from which we can actually speak to their lives. However, we must be discerning when it comes to the evidences in a person’s life that come from these two listings because it is what will ultimately provide discernment for how we minister to them.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Verbrugge, Verlyn D., ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Abridged. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.