

COLLECTIVE

Life in the Spirit Series (Lesson 3) – The Works of the Flesh

Our connect group lessons this year will focus primarily on Galatians 5.

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

The “works of the flesh” can be broken into these categories:

These three have to do with the works of the flesh in the area of sexuality:

- 1) Sexual immorality – “pornea” – sexual intercourse between unmarried people.
- 2) Impurity – “akatharsia” – unnatural sexual practices and relationships.
- 3) Debauchery – “aselgia” – uncontrolled sexuality.

These two have to do with the area of religion:

- 1) Idolatry – “eidololatria”.
- 2) Witchcraft – “pharmakeia”.

Because idolatry is paired with witchcraft, it is not referring to the very broad inclusive practice of making good things like career into “god”. Rather, Paul is referring to the very specific occult and pagan religious practices.

The eight descriptions below show how the flesh destroys relationships:

There are four that describes destructive attitudes:

- 1) Selfish ambition – “eritheia” – competitiveness, self-seeking.
- 2) Envy – “phthonoi” – coveting, a desire for what others have.
- 3) Jealousy – “zhdlos” – the zeal and energy that comes from a hungry ego.
- 4) Hatred – “echthrai” – hostility, adversarial attitude.

There are four that describes the results of these attitudes in relationships:

- 1) Discord – “eris” – argumentative, fight picking behavior.
- 2) Fits of rage – “thumoi” – outbursts, of anger (leading to point no. 3).
- 3) Dissensions – “dichostaiai” – divisions between people.
- 4) Faction – “aireseis” – permanent parties and warring factions.

These two refer to substance abuse:

- 1) Drunkenness.
- 2) Orgies.

These two are linked. Orgies are not “sex-orgies” but “drinking orgies”. One of the works of the flesh is addiction to pleasure creating substances and behavior.

Another way to break down this list into categories is to notice that some of the sins are characteristics of religious people (selfishness, envy, jealousy, factions), while others are characteristics of irreligious people (immorality, drunkenness).

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This list shows us that God does not make the kind of distinctions that we commonly do, seeing sex and drink as more sinful than jealousy and ambition.

Paul says that the “flesh” (Galatians 5:16) is the drive to continue to live “under law” (Galatians 5:17). In other words, underneath every problem and difficulty is a residual self-righteousness, left over systems of self-salvation.

Why are we bitter? Why are we in despair? Why are we worried? Why do we do so many of the good things we do? Because something more important than Jesus is operating as our functional righteousness and worth.

If we do not repent of the self-righteousness under our sins, we will not be able to fight and reduce the power fueling them. If we do not repent of the self-righteousness under our good deeds, we will set ourselves up for anxiety and anger when things do not go well because we feel God owes us.

The Gospel leads to true repentance of the heart, not just superficial transformations. The religious will focus and work on simply changing behavior, while the irreligious will focus and work on simply changing or accommodating emotions.

But repentance gets into what is under both behavior and feelings to the root of the problem. True transformation comes only when we address what is internal and underneath, such as – greed, envy, pride, hatred, prejudice, vanity.

Reflection/discussion:

What can you learn about the human heart from this list? What have you learnt about yourself from this list?