

## LESSON TEN (5:16-21)

### **Works Of The Flesh**

*16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Christ did not set us free from bondage to the law only to have us yield to bondage to the flesh. To live as slaves to our own fleshly nature is directly contrary to the will of the Spirit for our lives. The Spirit and the flesh are at war within us. This lesson will set the stage for that battle and will catalog the evil forces of the flesh. The next lesson will present the forces for good: the fruit of the Spirit.

**V. 16 But I Say, Walk By The Spirit** - In contrast to the self-seeking indulgence warned against the preceding verses, the Christian must walk by the Spirit. The use of the word “walk” shows that the Christian life must be active and must be making progress. The fact that we are not under law but under grace does not exempt us from this walk. We who have life through the Spirit must walk by the Spirit.

**Do Not Gratify The Desires Of The Flesh** - The way in which Paul expressed this is very strong in the Greek. An expanded translation would read, “By no means shall you gratify. . . .” When Paul wrote “the desires of the flesh,” he was referring to the unredeemed nature of man at its worst.

**V. 17 For The Desires Of The Flesh** - The appetites of the physical body are neither good nor bad; they are neutral. When they are satisfied within the framework of God’s plan for mankind, they are good. When they are allowed to dominate a man’s life with no restraining guidance from the Spirit, they are bad. If a man is hungry and his eyes see food, his flesh says, “Eat!” Now the man’s spirit must over rule his flesh, or fall into sin. The life in which flesh is allowed to run rampant will have total disregard for right and wrong. It is in this perspective of ultimate lawlessness that Paul is using the word “flesh.”

**The Desires Of The Spirit** - While the ultimate goal of flesh is self-preservation and self-satisfaction, the aim of the Holy Spirit is for us to get in line with God’s will. Our human spirits must surrender completely to the Holy Spirit, so that He becomes the governor of our lives. The man whose final authority is his flesh is no better than a brute animal. The man whose final authority is the Spirit is a child of God.

**To Prevent You From Doing What You Would** - The conflict works both ways. The flesh interferes with the will of the flesh. We necessarily surrender to one, and overcome the other.

**V. 18 But If You Are Led By The Spirit** - As the Christian walks through life (see vs. 16) he must follow the leading of the Spirit. But how is he to know which way the Spirit is leading? If he finds the will of the Spirit in the scriptures inspired by the Spirit, he is on solid ground. If he thinks to find the will of the Spirit in his own inner impulses and feelings, he is dangerously close to following the will of the flesh. Apart from the truth of God’s Word, how can he tell whether his feelings are being generated by flesh or Spirit?

**You Are Not Under The Law** - While we are being led by the Spirit we are not under law, because we need no law. While the Spirit is leading us to love, we need no law to forbid us

to hate. Law has power neither to command nor condemn those who are being led by the Spirit. Perhaps the best commentary on this verse is that of Paul himself in Romans 8:1-17.

**V. 19 Now The Works Of The Flesh Are Plain** - If a man allows his own fleshly nature to have free rein in his life, he can look forward to the sins in the following list. These are not all the evils which the flesh can produce, but they are certainly enough to prove the point. Note that all these are characterized by selfish indulgence, rather than obedient surrender.

**Immorality** - Immorality, or fornication, is a general word including all forms of unlawful sexual activity from adultery to homosexuality to prostitution. In New Testament times sexual standards among the Greeks and Romans were quite low. The Roman author Seneca noted that “Chastity is simply proof of ugliness,” and that “innocence is not rare, it is non-existent.” Gibbons has recorded that “of the first fifteen Emperors, Claudius was the only one whose taste in love was entirely correct.” Among the Greeks, especially the philosophers, homosexuality was “the great national disease.”

**Impurity** - Impurity, or uncleanness, means general filth or defilement of one’s moral being. It points to a dirty mind, dirty actions, and a dirty life. Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, used this word to name the ugly accumulation around a festering sore or wound. The Greek Old Testament frequently used this same word in connection with the defilement that makes a man or woman unfit to come before the presence of God. In the New Testament it refers to a foul indecency of mind, or a spirit soiled and stained by the world.

**Licentiousness** - This is the strongest and broadest term for moral indecency. Also translated lasciviousness or indecency, it names the reckless abandonment of what is decent and right. Josephus (*Antiquities*, XX, 5, 3) tells of a Roman soldier standing guard at a Temple ceremony in Jerusalem about 45 or 46 AD. As if his very presence were not defiling enough, he publicly dropped his clothes and relieved himself, outraging public decency and recklessly defiling the sacred grounds. When a person is so corrupt that he neither cares about public respect, nor fears divine wrath, he has “licentiousness.”

**Idolatry** - Idolatry is literally “the worship of what can be seen.” William Barclay says that to the ancients, the idol had two functions: To localize and to visualize the god it represented. While some superstitious reverence was attached to the same or wooden image, the people recognized that it was only a man-made representation of an ungod, for their own benefit. In order to gain good crops and fertile herds, they would worship the idol which represented the goddess of fertility.

Their worship, then, was actually a selfish greed to gain things for themselves. In this sense, Col. 3:5 says idolatry and covetousness are the same sin. The Lord God despises the sin of idolatry for two reasons:

1. It is a rejection to the true God (Rom. 1:23)
2. It is a worship prompted only by greed. (Col. 3:5)

Idolatry is practiced today without visible idols.

**V. 20 Sorcery** - Originally “sorcery” was the use of drugs, whether for good or evil purposes. Our modern pharmacy traces back to this word (Gk. *pharmakeia*) in its better sense. The word was always used in its evil sense in the Greek Old Testament, being closely associated with witchcraft (See Ex. 7:11 & 22); Isa. 47:9 & 12). Sorcery is an attempt to gain mastery over another person’s life by occult means, especially the use of incantations and drugs.

**Enmity** - Enmity is the exact opposite of agape love (See 5:22). In another form, this same word is the common Greek term for “enemy.” It refers to an attitude of automatic hostility, such as Jews felt toward all non-Jews, and Greeks felt toward non-Greeks. While love ignores the faults and reaches out, enmity ignores the virtues and shrinks back. It is self-preservation at its fleshly worst.

**Strife** - Strife is the exact opposite of agape love (See 5:22). It involves quarreling, squabbling, and general conflict. How unfortunate that this word could so accurately describe at least one early church (I Cor. 1:11; 3:3)!

In Greek mythology, Strife (Gk. *eris*) was the goddess of discord. Enraged because she was the only deity not invited to a certain marriage feast, she threw into the midst of the gullet a golden apple inscribed “to the fairest.” When no fewer than three goddesses claimed the apple, such discord and strife arose among the gods that it spilled over into human affairs and started the famous Trojan war. While only a myth, the story well illustrates the meaning of Strife.

**Jealousy** - Jealousy was a word with both a good and a bad sense. In the good sense it was “zeal,” a passionate desire or devotion to a noble end. However, since this fervor for a cause is easily perverted into selfish ambition, the word takes on a frequent bad sense. A competitive spirit may produce excellence, but it may also produce jealousy toward the success of someone else. Then the competitor no longer wants to achieve his own glories, but wants to take those achieved by another.

**Anger** - Anger is another word that once had a noble side, but turned bad. (This is what always happens to flesh when it is totally uncontrolled by Spirit!) Although the word once meant courage and strong spirit, by New Testament times it came to mean a sudden outburst of bad temper or wrath. The fact that this wrath explodes quickly and then may be over in no way makes it a virtue.

The person who has vomited up all his rage on everyone around him will usually feel better for “getting it out of his system.” This may help him (self-preservation of the flesh), but what about all those upon whom he has spewed his wrath? Is this the way of love?

Neither is the solution to try to bottle up the anger. The pent-up rage will eat like an acid inside a man, until he is finally destroyed. The only solution is to let Jesus drink that bitter cup for us. He alone can convert our bitter anger into better love.

**Selfishness** - This word is also translated as “factions” (KJV) and “selfish ambition” (NEB). The word originally meant to work for pay. It soon came to mean the willingness to do practically anything, solely for what one could get out of it for himself. Aristotle used the word in reference to politicians who sought power and prestige, rather than a place to serve their people. The vengeful selfishness of the word is well seen in Phil. 1:17, where some were preaching Christ out of “partisanship,” seeking only their own gain and hoping to cause trouble for Paul.

**Dissension** - The Greek word for dissension or divisions means literally “to stand apart.” This is the opposite of the Christian ideals of peace for mankind. In fact, the final plan for the end of the ages calls for the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth (Col. 2:20; Eph. 1:10). When all things are put right with God, they will necessarily be put right with one another.

Today the church of Christ is racked with divisions, which cannot be justified. When God’s children divide from one another, they are exercising the will of their former nature, which we know as the flesh.

**Party Spirit** - This comes from the verb meaning “I choose.” When someone chooses a viewpoint different from what is accepted as true, he is called a “heretic” and his belief is “heresy.” (Thus the KJV translation of this word.) In the New Testament, however, the primary meaning has to do with choosing up sides and forming a distinctive sect.

Forming an exclusive party around a pet doctrine is sinful even if that doctrine is true!

**V. 21 Envy** - Envy is a genuine feeling of malice toward another person. It is more than just jealousy. The jealous man wants the gain that another man got; the envious man just wants to see the other man deprived.

The old “dog in the manger” fable well describes this kind of envy. The dog does not want and cannot use the hay in that manger, but it is determined to keep away the animals that could use it. When a man is unhappy so long as his neighbor is happy, he is guilty of this sin.

Jealousy says, “I want what you have.”

Envy says, “I just don’t want you to have.”

**Drunkenness** - This word is plural in the Greek, apparently referring to repeated instances of intoxication. Although wine was a universal drink throughout the Mediterranean world, drunkenness was widely recognized as wrong. Jews, Greeks, Romans - all diluted their natural wine with water to avoid intoxication. If someone deliberately wanted to get drunk, he left out part or all of the water.

It is often asserted that alcoholism is a disease, and should be pitied, not preached against. Alcoholism may be a disease, but drunkenness is a sin! Perhaps some men have a lower tolerance for alcohol than others, but all men should know that intoxication is sin.

**Carousing** - This word is also plural, and could be translated orgies. It refers to the shameful celebrations of the perversion of man's natural appetites for food, drink, and sexual fulfillment.

In II Maccabees is related the attempt of the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes to bring an end to Judaism. He made it punishable by death to observe the Sabbath or possess a copy of the Torah. He made a burnt offering of swine on the sacred altar. Then he made the Temple a house of prostitution. In II Macc. 6:4 it says that the Temple was filled with riot and "carousing."

**I Warn You, As I Warned You Before** - The solemn repetition serves to underscore the seriousness of this matter.

**Those Who Do Such Things** - The Greek tense of the word "do" indicates that Paul has in mind the continuing practice that develops into permanent habits. To whatever extent we may still find traces of these vices, we must labor with God's Spirit to eliminate them.

**Shall Not Inherit The Kingdom Of God** - Sinful attitudes may escape the notice of men, but not God. If someone's real desire and direction for life is characterized by the works of the flesh, he will not go to heaven. Despite appearances to the contrary, he is not really a child of God, nor a member of the body of Christ. Consequently, if such be the case, he has no inheritance rights.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Are physical appetites always evil?
2. How are the desires of the flesh in conflict with the desires of the Spirit?
3. Can you think of illustrations in the Old Testament for each of the works of the flesh?
4. How is idolatry like covetousness?
5. Why is a nice little sin like losing your temper grouped with such big bad sins as fornication and idolatry?
6. What is the true New Testament sense of the word "heresy"?
7. How is envy worse than jealousy?

8. What is the difference between an alcoholic and a drunk?
  
9. Which work of the flesh would you admit to be a trouble area for you? What are you going to do about it?
  
10. Since this group of sins is obviously not exhaustive, why do you suppose Paul chose these for this context?

### ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. "To live as \_\_\_\_\_ to our own \_\_\_\_\_ nature is directly contrary to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ or our lives."
2. What does the word "walk" imply in Gal. 5:16?
3. Provide an expanded translation of "do not gratify" in Gal. 5:16.
4. What was Paul referring to when he wrote "the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16)?
5. What is the ultimate aim/goal of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:17)?
6. "Our human spirits must \_\_\_\_\_ to the Holy Spirit, so that He becomes the \_\_\_\_\_ of our lives. The man whose final \_\_\_\_\_ is his \_\_\_\_\_ is no better than a \_\_\_\_\_. The man whose final \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ is a \_\_\_\_\_ of God."
7. "The flesh \_\_\_\_\_ with the will of the Spirit, and the Spirit \_\_\_\_\_ with the will of the flesh. We necessarily \_\_\_\_\_ to one, and \_\_\_\_\_ the other."
8. How can a Christian know which way the Spirit is leading?
9. Explain the textbook author's comment: "While the Spirit is leading us to love, we need no law to forbid us to hate."
10. List and memorize the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).
11. How does this lesson define "immorality"?
12. Summarize the sexual standards among the Greeks and Romans in New Testament times.

13. How does this lesson define “impurity”?
14. How does Hippocrates use the word “impurity” in the field of medicine?
15. “In the New Testament it [impurity] refers to a \_\_\_\_\_ of mind, or a spirit \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by the world.”
16. Provide a definition of “licentiousness.”
17. “When a person is so \_\_\_\_\_ that he neither \_\_\_\_\_ about public respect, nor fears \_\_\_\_\_, he has “\_\_\_\_\_.”
18. What is the literal definition of “idolatry”?
19. According to William Barclay, what were the two functions an idol had in ancient times?
20. List two reasons why the Lord God despises the sin of idolatry.
21. How does this lesson define “sorcery”?
22. “Sorcery is an attempt to gain \_\_\_\_\_ over another person’s life by \_\_\_\_\_ means, especially the use of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”
23. Summarize this lesson’s definition of “enmity.”
24. How does this lesson define “strife”?
25. How does this lesson define “jealousy”? Be sure to define “jealousy” in a good sense and a bad sense.
26. How does this lesson define “anger”?
27. What is the best way for a Christian to deal with anger?
28. How does this lesson define “selfishness”?
29. How did Aristotle use the word “selfishness”?
30. What is the literal meaning of “dissension”?
31. “Party spirit” comes from the verb meaning, ‘\_\_\_\_\_.’”
32. What is the primary meaning of “party spirit” in the New Testament?
33. How does this lesson define “envy”?
34. “\_\_\_\_\_ says, ‘I want what you have.’ \_\_\_\_\_ says, ‘I just don’t want you to have.’”
35. How does this lesson define “drunkenness”?

36. What did the Jews, Greeks, and Romans do to their wine to avoid intoxication?
37. How does this lesson define “carousing”?
38. What is significant about the Greek tense of the word “do” in Gal. 5:21?
39. What penalty awaits those who indulge in the works of the flesh shared in this lesson?