A Study of Galatians 5:19-21..."The Works of the Flesh"

In Gal. chapter 5 verses 19-23, the apostle Paul gives us a listing of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Paul uses the concept of the flesh to remind us that we dwell in a body which constantly pulls us toward the desires and actions of our fallen sinful natures.

When we were transferred from Satan's dominion and control, to Christ's, our flesh was crucified and rendered powerless as to its ability to control our thoughts and actions. The Holy Spirit was given the place of authority in our lives. Our moral choices were controlled by his direction.

Our problem is that the flesh doesn't stay dead. When we become careless about our spiritual lives or when we feed our flesh, it rears its ugly head and causes us problems.

This struggle between flesh/spirit is graphically portrayed for us by Paul in Rom. chapters 7 and 8. He makes it very clear in chapter 8 that the outcome of our struggle with the flesh is determined by what we "set our minds on". In vv. 5 and 6 he says "for those who are according to the flesh "set their minds" on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

"For the mind "set on the flesh" is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God for it is not even able to do so."

It is our purpose during our next several messages to share with you some insights from Paul's two lists in Gal. 5:19-23. Many of the thoughts are not original with me. William Barclay, Practical Word Studies in the NT and Strong's Concordance were all helpful and used in the preparation of the studies. Tonight we would like to share with you some thoughts on the "works of the flesh".

William Barclay

A "work" is something which a man produces for himself;
A "fruit" is something which is produced by a power which he does not possess.
The word adultery does appear in the oldest copies of the Bible. We usually think of adultery as unlawful sexual conduct between people who are married, but not to each other. We think of fornication as sexual conduct between unmarried people.

The word Paul uses is porneia (por–ni’–ah) (AV..."fornication") (other trans..."immorality", "sexual immorality", "sexual vice"): "broad, general word for unlawful and immoral sexual intercourse and relationships" It includes fornication, adultery, homosexuality and perverted sexual practices. Background / prostitution / buying / selling. The love which is bought and sold which is no love at all.

The person with whom this love is shared is not considered a person but a thing. Unlawful sexual behavior always devalues and degrades the object of its lust and passion.

It is always selfish.

True love is the total union of two personalities in a way that will benefit and value each one.

Porneia is the relationship in which one can be purchased, used, and disregarded. There is neither union of, nor respect for, personality.

The Greek / Roman world was unspeakably immoral / filthy—adultery, fornication, homosexuality were widely practiced and condoned.

Chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity introduced into the pagan world.

Three reasons why it was difficult to introduce:
1. No strong body of opinion against immorality:
   (Immorality was considered customary and practiced widely)

2. Gnostic ideas:
   Spirit altogether good,
   Body altogether bad.
   Since body is evil, indulge it, do with it what is desired, the body is a perishing, evil thing.

3. Prostitution was often connected with religion.
   Many temples with crowds of religious prostitutes.
Aphrodite in Corinth had 1000 sacred prostitutes. Religion and sexual immorality went hand in hand.

We need to remember Christ's warning about looking with lust. He makes it clear that lustful looking and thinking are the same as if we have committed the act.

Brethren need to be especially careful of the eye-gate. Looking at and dwelling on members of the opposite sex, photos, images, lewd stories or anything which will inflame the passions is very dangerous and sinful.

Sisters, you need to realize your responsibility to dress modestly and to behave in a way that is not seductive.

The area of our sexuality is second only to the will to live in its demands on us. We need to submit it to God's Holy Spirit and place ourselves under accountability to some person if necessary. It is one of the three primary methods the devil uses to attack us. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life."

Michael Card says,

There is a joy in the journey
There is a light we can love on the way
There is a wonder and wildness to life
and freedom for those who obey

In an article in Finding God at Harvard the following appears:

God harnesses the power and pleasure of sexual love within the context of marriage, because commitment actually enables love to grow and deepen. He commands purity outside of heterosexual marriage, and faithfulness within it. He considers all sexual wrongdoing to be offenses against himself, above and beyond any harm done to another person or even oneself—which cuts radically across prevailing notions of acceptable consensual adult behavior.

"Akatharsia" (Ak – ath – ar – see' – ahn) (AV..."uncleanness"): impurity, vileness, dirty-mindedness, unclean lives.
Used of physical things
Outgoing tenant leaves no "akatharsia"
The puss that gathers around a wound.

I. Soiled or dirty
   There is the mind which is dirty and soils everything which passes through it.

II. Repulsive quality
   Awakens disgust and loathing in any decent person.

III. That which separates a man from God.
"The sinner who repents will never find God far away, but the sinner who glories in his impurity has erected a barrier between himself and God"
—William Barkclay

"Aselgeia" (As - elg' - I - ahn) (AV..."licentiousness", "lasciviousness", "sensuality", "indecency"): A man who loves sin so recklessly and audaciously that he has ceased to care what God or man thinks of his actions.
   Makes no attempt to hide or cover its sin.

   I. Wanton and undisciplined action.
      The action of a man at the mercy of his passions / impulses
   II. No respect for the person or rights of anyone else.
      Violent, abusive, audacious, insolent. No sympathy or feeling for others.
   III. Completely indifferent to public opinion / public decency.
      A man may begin to sin in secret, loves it, even mastered by it, but still ashamed by it.
      Then he moves to open, blatant practice without self-respect / shame.

"The terrible thing about aseigeia is that it is the act of a Character which has lost that which ought to be its greatest defense— It's self-respect and its sense of shame."
EIDEOLOLOTREIA (I-do-lol-at-ri'-ahs) (AV..."idolatry", O.T.-"idol worship", "worship of false gods")

The worship of idols seems difficult for us to understand. Why would any thinking person place worship/reverence to a piece of wood or stone? It is even more difficult to understand when we learn that ancient idols were often ugly or disgusting.

In the beginning no one worshipped the idol. The idol had two functions:

1. To localize the god it represented
2. To visualize the god it represented.

Since gods could not be seen or felt, the ancients began to set up idols to represent the god they were worshipping.

When that was done it was an easy step to go from worship of the god to worship of the idol.

Emperor worship illustrates this...

It began as an expression of gratitude for the safety, security, justice and good order the Romans brought to men.

Rome cleared the sea of pirates,
The roads of brigands/robbers.
Rome brought even-handed justice to replace the caprice of tyrants.
Out of gratitude people began to worship the goddess Roma, the spirit of Rome. This went on for more than a century, but men were hungry for something to see, and Rome and the spirit of Rome were impersonated in the Emperor.

So worship was transferred to the emperor himself.
In the beginning this embarrassed the emperors and they tried to end it.

But to those on the outskirts of the Roman world, the emperor was only a name. So statues were erected to represent him and worship was transferred to the statue.

First there was worship of the unseen spirit, then of the visible emperor, then of the present statue.

Here we see the first basic error of idol worship:
Idol worship is the worship of the created thing rather than the creator of all things.

Paul traces this development in Rom. 1:19-23 (NAS).

This kind of idolatry still exists.

It is the worship of things instead of the worship of God.

A man's god may rightly be said to be that to which he dedicates his time, his money and his talents— That to which he gives himself.

Whenever anything in the world begins to hold the principal place in our hearts, minds and aims, then that thing has become an idol, which belongs to God.

Paul connects the sexual sins with idolatry. Directly after them he lists idolatry. In the ancient world sexual immorality and idol worship were closely connected.

In the book of Hosea the mother, which represents Israel, says, "I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Then the voice of God says, "she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil..." (Hos. 2:5,8)

In Palestine before the Israelite worship, the Cannanites believed that it was those gods who gave fertility to the crops.

They believed that engaging in sexual acts with the prostitutes who represented the Baals would increase the fertility of the land and people.

The Cannanite religions were unspeakably immoral and sinful.

They were also very alluring to the people of Israel. Satan used the sensual sins to tempt them.

The tragedy of idol worship was twofold:

1. Men worshipped the created thing instead of the creator.
2. Men used the sex act, which was meant to be a beautiful bond between husband and wife, as a perverted sinful act of worship.

Idol worship destroyed true worship of God and destroyed that purity which is meant to be shared only between husband and wife.

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1 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
Pharmakeia (far-mak-ɪ'-ah) (AV..."witchcraft", other trans..."sorcery", "magic")

The word followed a process of degeneration in meaning.
Pharmakeia means the use of drugs.
There were three stages in the meaning of the word.

1. **First**— It is used medically with no bad meaning. At this stage pharmakeia was simply a medical word for the medical use of drugs.
2. **Next**— the word began to describe the misuse of drugs, the use of drugs to poison, not to curse.
3. **Finally**— the word took the meaning of sorcery and witchcraft.

So we see the word has gone full circle, from meaning a healing and a curative drug, it has come to mean a vicious and malignant dealing with witchcraft and sorcery.

Christianity was introduced into the world at a time when the use of sorcery and the magical arts was widespread.

There are many inscriptions on sepulchers commemorating the death of an individual which was caused by supernatural means.

People used magic to gain advantage over others or to hurt them.

Briefly, some of the magical practices which Paul would have forbidden were:

- The writing of the name of the person who was to be injured, on a tablet along with sinister signs and words.
- A wax image of the person was made and then slowly melted down or destroyed in some other way.
- Bones were buried under a man's house to cause his death.
- The "evil eye" was universally feared.
- When Paul says in Gal. 3:1, "Who hath bewitched you?", he is referring to the curse of the evil eye.

The evil eye could be guarded against by spitting into the folds of one's coat or by wearing amulets. These amulets contained a miniature model of the male sex organ, showing witchcraft and sorcery's close association with the unlawful sexual practices.
In Acts 19:19 we read of the magical experts who burned their books after they had been converted.

It is great to know that we serve a God who has demonstrated his power over the unseen forces of spiritual darkness. It goes without saying that the Christian should never take part in anything connected with the spirit world. I personally believe a Christian should avoid such things as horoscopes, oujia boards and other uses of the supernatural.

The child of God is safe from invasion by Satan, but he can open himself up for Satan to get a foothold in his life by experimenting with these things.

Echthra (Ekh'-thrah-ee) (AV..."hatred", O.T.- "enmity", "quarrels", "feud")

This is related to the Greek word for enemy.
It signifies a sense of hostility between brothers/sisters.
It occurs in only two other NT passages.
In Romans 8:7 Paul writes that "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" and in Eph. 2:14,16 the word is used of the dividing wall of hostility which separates Jew and Gentile until both become one in Jesus Christ.

This is a hatred that lingers and is held for a long time, a hatred that is deep within.
—Like holding a grudge against a brother or sister or refusing to speak to or be reconciled to a son, daughter or spouse.

It is the exact opposite of agape love, the supreme Christian virtue. Agape will never allow itself to be bitter. It will never seek anything but the best for others, no matter what the attitude of others be to it.

Echthra is the attitude of mind and heart which puts up the barriers and which draws the sword. Agape is the attitude of the heart and mind which widens the circle and holds out the arms of love. The one is the work of the flesh; the other is the Fruit of the Spirit.

Eris (Er'-is) (AV..."variance", O.T.- "strife", "a contentious temper", "dissension", "disputing", "quarreling")

Eris is very closely related to echthra. Eris is the acting out of the enmity which is an attitude of the mind.

In the NT eris is always an evil thing. It describes a man who is given to selfish rivalry; arguments and quarrellings.

It means a man who fights against another person in order to get something, like position, promotion, property, honor, recognition. He fights in a dishonest and evil way.

It was eris which divided the Corinthian church into sects and parties, some for Peter, Paul, Apollos or Christ.

Eris had split the church and brought enmity where there should have been love. In Phil 1:15 Paul says it is eris which causes some to preach in a way that would discredit Paul.

Eris invades our thinking when we think more about people, parties or slogans and about personal issues than we do about Christ.

Whenever we fail to give Jesus Christ first place in our thinking all our human relationships will suffer. Eris will raise its ugly head. If we preach/teach to exalt self in place of Christ then eris comes in.

When a man argues to demolish his opponent instead of to win him, eris comes in.

No sin is more common or more destructive than eris. But eris can never gain a foothold if Christ is given first place in our lives.

Zelos (dzay'-los) (AV..."emulations", O.T.- "jealousy", "envy", "rivalry")

This is a jealous desire for what someone else has. It may be material things, recognition, honor or position. This word originally denoted a good desire to attain to nobility when we see it. But it degenerated and came to mean the desire to have what someone else has— a wrong desire for what is not ours.

This is the spirit of jealousy which burned in the hearts of Joseph's brothers when they saw that Jacob loved him more than them.

It is the spirit of jealousy and anger which the prodigal's brother exhibited when the father received the younger son back and began celebrating.
Certainly this is the work of the flesh which we need to guard against. This is the spirit which will cause us to resent our brother or sister's good fortune or position.

Thumos (thoo-mos') (AV..."wrath", O.T.- "anger", "fits of rage", "temper", "outbursts of passion")

This word describes a violent, explosive temper. Outburst of anger, quick-tempered, explosive reactions that arise from stirred and boiling emotions. It describes an anger which rises quickly but just as quickly fades away. It is not anger that lasts.

Anger is a product of the flesh. It can lead us into sinful areas we normally would not enter. If we have an explosive temper we need to allow God the Holy Spirit to help us to overcome it.

Eritheia (Er-ith-I'-ah) (AV..."strife") (Gr.- "strifes") (O.T.- "factions", "selfishness", "rivalry", "contention")

The word is used to describe a factious attitude, one where there is envying, disputes, selfishness, selfish ambitions, an envious spirit.

It also speaks of cliques which stand as a rival to others.

A factious spirit caused by selfishness or self-seeking.

Paul uses the word in 2 Cor. 12:20 where he says, "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults." 4

Paul lists the word in some pretty bad company. Surely this is an attitude we want to stay away from.

Dichostasia (dee-khos-tas-ee'-ah-ee) (AV..."seditions", other trans..."divisions", "dissension", "factions", "party spirit", "those who cause trouble")

4The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
The word literally means a "standing apart". It describes a group where the members fly apart instead of standing together in unity.

Today we may experience dichostasia in a number of ways:

1. a personal division/a feud between persons where we avoid each other and where we fail to speak to each other.
2. a party division where people in the church form into cliques and groups for different people.
3. a racial or class division where we tend to look down on others as inferior or less than you are.
4. a theological division where one holds himself aloof from another because of a disagreement with him/her on a theological matter. Barclay says men should be able to disagree and still be friends.

William Barclay says,

Quote,

There is here a challenge and a summons, not so much to criticize others as to examine ourselves. There is nothing easier than to confuse prejudices with principles, and to confuse unreasonable stubbornness with unwavering resolution. It is perfectly true that often a Christian has to stand alone, but a man will do well to examine himself when he finds that the opinions he holds are separating him from the community of which he forms a part. He may be right, but it is a grave responsibility to be a cause of division in any church or community. Before he separates himself from others a man ought to remember the solemn words of Cromwell to the intransigent Scots: 'I beseech you by the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken.'

End of quote
Hairesis (ah'-ee-res-ee-is) (AV..."heresies", O.T. - "party spirit", "party intrigues", "factions", "party quarrels")

This word is almost a transliteration from the Greek to our word heresies. In English it means a belief that is contrary to true doctrine, but in Greek it means either "an act of choosing or a choice".

In NT times it denotes a body of people belonging to a particular school of thought and holding a particular kind of belief— a body of people who have all made the same choice.

In this passage, division and disunity is in view— a party spirit which destroys the unity of the body.

In Corinth Paul addresses this spirit when he tells them they come together not to eat a meal of unity, but one is hungry and another is drunken.

What should have been a harmonious, loving, unifying meal turned into little self-contained, selfish groups. A fragmented church is not a church at all.

Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; Unyielding intolerance is a sin.

Phthonos (fthon'-o') (AV..."envyings", O.T..."envy", "jealousy", "strife")

The word means that a person covets what someone else has, covets it so much that he wants it even if it means that it has to be taken away from the other person. He may even wish that the other person did not have it or had not received it.

We may look at people and envy their...

- Money
- Position
- Looks
- Social status
- Recognition
- Possessions
- Popularity
- Clothes
- Authority
The results of envy are terrible; envy takes a terrible toll upon the life and body of a person.

- A person who envies does not have peace or happiness. He is dissatisfied with what he is and has and is always wanting more and more of what others have.
- In addition to this, envy often drives a person into crime and lawlessness in order to get what he craves.
- Furthermore, envy often leads to physical problems such as migraine headaches, high blood pressure, and ulcers.
- Envy also causes emotional problems ranging from mild neurosis of depression to psychotic behavior.

But thanks be to God our Savior. He saves and delivers us from envy. Through Christ He gives us life, real life, and he satisfies our hearts and lives with pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

Murders... AV..."murders" (O.T.)

The word is not in the best texts. We don't have any problem figuring out what it is. To murder is to kill, to take the life of another. While most of us will never commit this crime we need to remember the Bible tells us that sins of the mind can lead to murder. In fact 1 John 3:15 says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer...".

We need to guard against the sins of envy hatred, jealousy and pride— the sins which make one hate another or feel superior to another.

Methe (meth'-ay) (AV..."drunkenness", O.T.- "drinking bouts, "hard drinking")

In the ancient world this was not a common vice. The Greeks drank more wine than milk. Even children drank wine. But they drank it in the proportion of three parts of water to two of wine.

Greek and Christian alike would have condemned drunkenness as a thing which turned a man into a beast.

Today one can become drunk with alcohol, drugs, power, lust, etc.

Practical Application
Becoming drunk with wine (or any other strong drink or drug) has several bad effects:

- It indulges the lust, the appetite of the flesh.
- It loosens up a person's moral restraints and allows the indulging of sexual and immoral cravings.
- It dulls the mind to responsibility.
- It burdens the heart and conscience and causes guilt, at least until a person becomes hardened in his sin.
- It deadens feelings for spouses and loved ones, causing distance and withdrawal (such is seldom, if ever, regained).
- It harms the body.

Komois (Ko'moys) (AV..."revellings", O.T.- "revelry", "carousing", "orgies", "riotous feasting", "disorderly dancing")

The word means revelry. In the Greek it has a particular background to it. It describes the joyful procession through the streets and the celebration following a man's victory in the games. His friends united to convoy him through the streets and then to feast and drink with him in celebration.

Komos expresses a lustful excess in physical and sexual pleasure which is offensive to God and man as well. Perhaps a good English word would be "debauchery".

There is one way for the Christian to avoid this type of sin. It is to remember always that he/she is forever in the presence of Jesus Christ and so to seek ever to make life in its work and its pleasure fit for Jesus Christ to see.

Perhaps here is a good place to mention that each of the works of the flesh is a perversion of something which is good.
The sensual sins are a perversion of the beautiful sexual relationship which should exist between husband and wife.

Idolatry is a perversion of the beauty of true worship of a holy God.

Sorcery is a perversion of the use of healing drugs in medicine.

Envy, jealousy and strife are perversions of that noble desire to do well which can be a spur to greatness.

Enmity and anger are a perversion of that righteous indignation without which the passion for goodness cannot exist.

Dissension and the party spirit are a perversion of the devotion to principle which can produce the martyr.

Drunkenness and carousing are a perversion of the happy joy of social fellowship of the things which men can happily and legitimately enjoy.

These "works" of the flesh take the potential of goodness and turn it into the material of evil.

Just as it is our responsibility to cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives, it is our responsibility to ruthlessly eradicate these works of the flesh.

Lest we get too smug thinking we are not guilty of these gross sins, we must remember that this list is by no means complete.

Our battle is against every kind of sin that Satan tempts us with. The sins of the mind, gossip, evil thoughts, pride, a critical spirit and lust are usually the sins we must deal with.

Let's determine with God's help to be vigilant against sin in our lives. Let's make it our goal to become more Christlike.