

Galatians 5: 19-26, Part 4

Galatians 5:19-26—“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

Idolatry (eidololatria):

- A couple of weeks ago I began looking at this particular term as it relates to greed, and then proceeded to talk about money, possessions and eternity.¹
- **Colossians 3:5** “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”
- Allow me to wrap up where I left off two weeks ago.
- I had stated that Jesus didn’t say that “No one should serve two masters...” but no one can serve two masters. This is because the issues of both money and God have to do with ownership and control. Note the following passage:
- **Matthew 6:19-24:** “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²²The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”
- Have you ever noticed how odd verses 22 and 23 are? Their confusing and don’t seem to be a part of the overall flow of thought.
 - The sayings before and after Matthew 6:22-23 deal with treasure or money.
 - In fact, the first would flow really well into the second if we simply left out the intervening verses 22-23. So why does Jesus link these two sayings about money and God with a saying about the good eye and the bad eye?
- The key appears to be in Matthew 20:15, but it won’t jump out at you in English.
 - Jesus had just told the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Some of them had agreed to work from 6 am to 6 pm for a denarius. Some the master hired at 9 am. Others at noon. Finally some he hired at 5 pm. When the day was done at 6 pm he paid all the workers the same thing—a denarius. In other words, he was lavishly generous to those who worked only one hour, and he paid the agreed amount to those who worked twelve hours.
 - We’re told that those who worked all day “grumbled at the master of the house” (Matthew 20:11). They were angry that those who worked so little were paid so much.

¹ This is also the title of an exceptional book on the subject by Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003).

- It is then that the master uses a phrase about “the bad eye” (similar to the one we see in 6:23).
- “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (*Matthew 20:15*). But literally it reads:
- “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or *is your eye bad?*” (*Matthew 20:15*).
- The “bad eye” here parallels the “bad eye” in Matthew 6:23.
- What does the bad eye refer to in Matthew 20:15?
- **Piper:** “It refers to an eye that cannot see the beauty of grace. It cannot see the brightness of generosity. It cannot see unexpected blessing to others as a precious treasure. It is an eye that is blind to what is truly beautiful and bright and precious and God-like. It is a worldly eye. It sees money and material reward as more to be desired than a beautiful display of free, gracious, God-like generosity.”²
- That is exactly what the “bad eye” means in the Sermon on the Mount.
- So the flow of thought would go like this:
- “Don’t lay up treasures on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven. Show that your heart is fixed on the value that God is for you in Christ. Make sure that your eye is good not bad. That is, make sure that you see heavenly treasure as infinitely more precious than earthly material treasure. When your eye sees things this way, you are full of light. And if you don’t see things this way, even the light you think you see (the glitz and flash and skin and muscle of this world) is all darkness. You are sleepwalking through life. You are serving money as a slave without even knowing it, because it has lulled you to sleep. Far better is to be swayed by the truth--the infinite value of God.”³
- So if you are emotionally drawn more by material things than by Christ, pray that God would give you a good eye and awaken you from the blindness of “the bad eye.”
- Jesus is relentless in his radical call to a wartime lifestyle and a hazardous liberality. One time he refers to the Old Testament minimum of giving a tenth of your income, endorses it, and then calls for a way of looking at life and money way more radical than the mere tithe.⁴
- The average church donor in America contributed a mean of \$649 to churches in 2000.⁵
- Nearly one-quarter of all born-again Christians (23%) gave no money to a church in 2000.⁶
- 12% of born again Christians tithed their income to churches in 2000.⁷
- If you personally were set free to give the way the New Testament talks about giving, you would be the happiest people on earth.

² John Piper, “What Is the “Bad Eye” in Matthew 6:23?” August 17, 2005, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2005/1302_What_Is_the_Bad_Eye_in_Matthew_623/.

³ Taken from John Piper, “What Is the “Bad Eye” in Matthew 6:23?” August 17, 2005, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2005/1302_What_Is_the_Bad_Eye_in_Matthew_623/.

⁴ See John Piper, “Don’t Be Anxious, Lay Up Treasure in Heaven, Part 1,” March 2003, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/14/127_Dont_Be_Anxious_Lay_Up_Treasure_in_Heaven_Part_1/.

⁵ These, and many many more statistics can be found in Dave Earley, “The he desperate Need for New Churches,” 7/2006, <http://pozfusion.com/user/19563//images/the/%20desperate%20need%20for%20new%20churches%202%20page.doc>.

⁶ Piper, “Don’t Be Anxious, Lay Up Treasure in Heaven.”

⁷ Piper, “Don’t Be Anxious, Lay Up Treasure in Heaven.”

- *Proverbs 14:21*, ‘Happy is he who is gracious to the poor.’
- *Proverbs 22:9*, ‘He who is generous will be blessed.’
- *1 Timothy 6:9*, ‘Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.’
- *Acts 20:35 (Jesus)*, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

Witchcraft (pharmakeia):

- At the root of this word is *pharmakon*, literally “drug,” from which we derive our English word “pharmacy.”
 - In classical Greek *pharmakeia* referred to the use of drugs whether for medicinal or more sinister purposes, e.g., poisoning.
 - In the New Testament the word is always associated with the occult... English translations usually render *pharmakeia* as “witchcraft” (KJV, NIV) or “sorcery” (RSV, NEB).
 - Hence it has two elements:
 - a) occultic and
 - b) drug use.
 - So the word “witchcraft” correctly conveys the idea of black magic and demonic control, but it misses the more basic meaning of drug use.
 - In New Testament times *pharmakeia* in fact denoted the use of drugs with occult properties for a variety of purposes including, especially, abortion.
 - **John T. Noonan:** “Paul’s usage here cannot be restricted to abortion, but the term he chose is comprehensive enough to include the use of *abortifacient* drugs.”⁸
 - Pharmakeia was a common term for abortion-inducing drugs and is borne out by its recurrence in other early Christian writings.
 - **The Didache**, “You shall not practice medicine (farmakeiva). You shall not slay the child by abortion (fqora). You shall not kill what is generated...” (*Didache*, 2.2).

Debauchery (aselgeia)

- William Barclay defines this particular vice as ‘a love of sin so reckless and so audacious that a man has ceased to care what God
- or man thinks of his actions.’
- Debauchery speaks of the total loss of limits, the lack of restraint, decency, and self-respect.
- Paul was not saying that all of the Galatians were guilty of such extreme licentiousness, but he was warning against a loose disregard for standards of sexual purity, a liberal lifestyle that in the end would lead them to the very pit.

Sins of Animosity

⁸ John T. Noonan, Jr., “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” in *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 9. That (farmakeía) was a common term for abortion-inducing drugs is borne out by its recurrence in other early Christian writings. Thus the *Didache* includes the following list of negative imperatives Christians were expected to obey: “You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not corrupt boys. You shall not fornicate. You shall not steal. You shall not make magic. You shall not practice medicine (farmakeía). You shall not slay the child by abortions (fqora). You shall not kill what is generated. You shall not desire your neighbors wife” (*Did.* 2.2). See further Timothy George, “Southern Baptist Heritage of Life” (Nashville: Christian Life Commission of the SBC, 1993).

Hatred (echthrai):

- This is the first of eight nouns Paul would mention, all of which refer to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships.
- Hatred or enmity (cf. “quarrels,” NEB) is the opposite of love.
- In Romans 8:7 Paul used this same word to describe the hostility of the sinful mind to God.
 - Here, however, its destructive force is played out on the plane of human relationships. The specific forms this hatred can take in tearing down community life Paul would enumerate in the following words:

Discord (eris):

- In the New Testament this word is unique to Paul, who used it nine times to characterize the strife and discord that beset so many of his congregations.
- The NEB translation “contentious temper” points to the source of so much wrangling and ill will among Christian brothers and sisters.
- Paul was aware of some who even preached Christ “out of envy and rivalry” (Phil 1:15).
 - Incidentally, this demonstrates that it is possible for the Lord to use even unworthy motives and selfish means to accomplish the greatest good.

Jealousy (zelos):

- Jealousy can be used in the Bible in a good sense to describe God himself. But here a negative connotation is meant. A jealous person is someone who wants what other people have.
- Jealousy often leads to bitterness and sometimes erupts into violence, as when Joseph’s brothers seized him in anger and sold him into slavery (cf. Gen 37:12-36).
- **Timothy George:** “At the root of all sentiments of jealousy is the basic posture of ingratitude to God, a failure to accept one’s life as a gift from God. To envy what someone else has is to fling one’s own gifts before God in unthankful rebellion and spite.”⁹

Fits of Rage (thymol):

- Here is another word with various shades of meaning depending upon the context in which it is used.
- This same word is used in Revelation to refer both to God’s wrath (14:10; 19:15) and Satan’s rage (12:12).
- Here in Galatians it means a passionate outburst of anger or hostile feeling.
- Such displays of uncontrollable verbal violence should not be excused as the product of “an Irish temper” or a natural propensity to “fly off the handle.”

Selfish Ambition (eritheiai).

- This is a term that derived from the political culture of ancient Greece, where it meant “office seeking” or “canvassing for office.”
- Although many godly men and women have been called to live out their Christian vocation in political life, it is also true that politics attracts those persons given to self-promotion and self-service rather than the service
- *Dissensions (dichostasiai).*
- Paul used this same word only on one other occasion:
 - **Romans 16:17:** “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause *divisions* and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”

⁹ Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture in The New American Commentary* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 395.

- Like the preceding word, “dissensions” carries political overtones suggesting the cultivation of a party spirit or exclusive elite within the church. Whenever this happens, the unity and fellowship of the body of Christ is fractured.

Factions (haireseis).

- This word too finds only one other occurrence in the Pauline corpus, in 1 Corinthians 11:19,
- The basic meaning of this word derives from the verb “to choose” (from which we also get our English word “heresy,” a deliberately chosen doctrine at variance with the rule of faith). This verse reminds us the divisive tendency so evident in many congregations is the result of intentional choices to walk in the way of selfish pride, envy, and bickering rather than the royal road of love, forgiveness, and magnanimity.

Envy (phthonoi).

- This is another classical word similar in meaning to the trait of jealousy listed earlier, except that *zēlos* is singular and *phthonoi*, “envyings,” is plural, suggesting the multitudinous expressions of envious desire.
- Rather it is the evil conduct and unacceptable rivalry that had sprung from the malice and ill will of the Galatians toward one another.

Sins of Intemperance

Drunkenness (methai).

- There is no place for drunkenness in a Spirit-directed lifestyle.
- Alcohol abuse was a common feature of urban life in the Roman Empire, but Paul expected a different, higher standard of conduct among those who belonged to Christ.
- In addition to the common abuse of alcohol, Paul may also have had in mind the cultic inebriation practiced by the mystery religion of Dionysos, the wine god.
- Paul portrayed excessive drinking as incompatible with real Christian commitment.
- However, the prohibition against drunkenness is not the same thing as a prohibition against all alcohol consumption. Drunkenness is not the same thing as “drinking.” Not the following chart:¹⁰

Scripture condemns drunkenness	Scripture condemns gluttony.	Scripture condemns infidelity.
Drinking alcohol can lead to drunkenness.	Enjoying food can lead to gluttony.	Enjoying sex can lead to sexual infidelity.
Therefore, Scripture condemns all alcohol.	Therefore, Scripture condemns all food consumption.	Therefore, Scripture condemns all sexual activity.

¹⁰ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *God Gave Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol* (Lincoln, CA: Oakdown, 2001), 32. For other words on the subject of alcohol and the Christian see G.I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1976); Andre Bustanoby, *The Wrath of Grapes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), Geerhardus Vos, *The Separated Life* (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Committee on Christian Education, 1936) and Kenneth Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

- *Psalm 104:14-15*—“He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth, and wine that gladdens the heart of man.”