

Proceeding Down The Wrong Path

Gal 5:19 *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, **and such like**: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Paul admonishes us to avoid *the works of the flesh* which will keep us out of heaven. The list is not complete as you notice he concludes it with the phrase "*and such like*:" This means along with the specifics listed comes the addition of all things similar. Those who believe drunkenness is a sin, but social drinking in moderation is acceptable need to consider this phrase at the end of the list.

For this article I would like to focus on three words at the beginning of the list. Although the KJV begins with the word "*adultery*" some manuscripts do not contain this word. Many later translations omit it. This is not a problem because "*fornication*" includes adultery, incest, and other sexual sins.

Paul starts with **fornication** (porneia). It is rendered "*immorality*" in the NAS. This is followed by **uncleanness** which is rendered "*impurity*" in the NAS (akatharsia). The third word is translated from (aselgea) and is rendered **lasciviousness**, "*sensuality*", or "*debauchery*" in different versions. The same word is translated **filthy** in 2 Pet. 2:7 to describe the conduct of Sodom. It is defined as licentiousness by Strong. Webster defines this word as "1: *lacking legal or moral restraints; especially disregard for sexual restraints.* 2: *marked by disregard for strict rules of correctness.*"

I believe the three terms give us a path of progression of sin in reverse order. A person starts with **no restraint** in his mind, he then engages in **impure** thoughts and activities, and ultimately winds up engaging in **fornication**. Jesus condemns

lusting after a woman even before the physical adultery takes place (Matt. 5:27-28). He is pointing out we can sin in our thoughts as well as with our bodies. All three terms are works of the flesh and will keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God.

The point we need to see is that we must stop sin long before it reaches the body. Sin must be defeated in the mind. We must think pure thoughts (Phil. 4:8). Every thought must become captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). To avoid the physical sins we need to avoid the mental ones. People who lust after things they have no right to possess, will eventually take what is not theirs. The mind fantasizes about someone else's wife, money, or property before the body takes it.

In Matt 6:13 Jesus taught us to pray, "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:..*" To be delivered from evil (sin) we must avoid or overcome temptation. Sometimes the way to overcome temptation is to not go in that direction. Let the Bible lead you down a different path. For Achan to avoid stealing he needed to avoid coveting. To avoid coveting he would have had to not see the treasures or turn away from them after he saw them. He could not focus on them and fantasize about taking them into his possession (Josh. 7:20-21). The same was true about David's sin with Bathsheba. He did not turn away from an accidental seeing. The woman's beauty captivated his eyes, his thoughts, and then his body (2 Sam. 11:1-4).

Our Lord told his Apostles how to avoid temptation in Matt 26:41 *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Peter's error with the sword resulted from his not being prepared for the temptation.

1 Cor 10:13 says, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" There is no such thing as an "I had to sin" moment. People who give into temptation saying, "I could not help myself" are people who let the mind wander and the body follow.

Paul gives us three reasons why we do not have to sin. The first is that all temptations are common to man. In other words, someone else has already been tempted like you have and has resisted sinning. You cannot say your temptation was unique, and no one could have resisted it.

Secondly, God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted by a temptation beyond your strength. He knows our weaknesses, and He will protect us from any temptation that is beyond our capability to handle.

Thirdly, with every temptation there is a way of escape. There is an alternative choice. Unfortunately, many do not avail themselves of this escape hatch. They wait too long. They flirt with the danger. They entertain and imagine the fulfillment they will gain from the sin. They become so enamored with the idea of sin they feel it cannot be avoided. "They have to do it!" Actually, they ran past the door of escape a long time ago. They did not turn away their eyes. They would not think of something else. They refused to move away from the vicinity of the potential sin.

People will imagine themselves entitled to a certain privilege or possession that is not theirs. They will not allow any restraints upon themselves. They will not accept the idea that what they want is off limits to them. They do not regard anything they want as being restricted from their grasp.

Then they will entertain the sin in their minds. They will mentally rehearse the sin in their thoughts and imagine the pleasure it will give them. They may even plot how to do it. We have known people who do this with hatred that leads to revenge.

Finally, if opportunity comes, they will pounce on the sin that has dominated their thinking for so long. They will commit adultery, murder, theft, or rape in an impassioned frenzy.

They may claim afterwards that they could not help themselves, but they actually did not take the way of escape that appeared much earlier. They were going the wrong direction and refused to turn around. Heed the warning. Take God's path.

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