

Intro:

I would like to return to our look at Christian Liberty and the fight against License today.

You will remember that we started off on this path with a message called *The Violent Christian*. We mean by that getting violent with one's self. It is a constant struggle as we all know too well.

I have to say that by faith it is also a victorious struggle. There is a place of real joy and peace that comes as we yield ourselves to the Spirit of God.

- We don't believe, as some have taught, that the struggle will be won if we simply 'yield ourselves enough'.
- We do believe, however, that every victory in the struggle comes by yielding. You could also call this *faith*.

As I prepared this message I was fighting off a terrible toothache, so I hope I am somewhat coherent as we consider our topic this afternoon.

Last time in this passage we were talking about *Walking in the Spirit*.

Today I want to talk about something else. I have given our message this title:

Deceitfulness of the Flesh

The burden of my message today is directed towards Christians and professing Christians primarily. It is also a warning to non-Christians, but I am primarily wanting to address two groups. Did you get the distinction I made?

Christians
and
Professing Christians

What is a professing Christian?

Someone who says they are but they aren't...

- Possibly ignorantly, because of self-deception
- Possibly maliciously, because of evil intentions

To these two groups, I am urging an understanding of the *Deceitfulness of the Flesh*.

- Christians need to heed this message because the deceitfulness of the flesh is a real danger.
- Professing Christians need to heed this message because they are most certainly deceived already, one way or another (... at least **one** way, but perhaps **many** ways...)

Read Gal 5.16-24, text 19-21

Proposition: The deceitfulness of the flesh is seen in the denial of the fleshliness of its works.

I. Fully worked out fleshliness

My purpose today is not to fully define these works, but to help you to see their scope as revealed in this passage.

A. The works of the flesh according to four categories

1. Works of sensual (sexual) passion

“Adultery — sexual intercourse between individuals married to someone else.
 Fornication — general term for all immoral behavior
 Uncleaness — lewdness, dirty-mindedness
 Lasciviousness — blatant contempt for public decency; shameless sensuality.”¹

2. Works of spiritual passion

“Idolatry — obsession with and dependence upon anything other than God to make life work
 Witchcraft — sorcery; use of magical powers; use of mediums and occult practices”²

3. Works of angry passion

“Hatred — hostile attitude toward others
 Variance — contentious spirit, hostile actions
 Emulations — spirit of envy
 Wrath — explosive angry outbursts
 Strife — rivalries coming from devotion to one’s self
 Seditions — feuding, divisive spirit within the group
 Heresies — disunity created by a stubborn opinion
 Envyings — embittered resentment often manifesting itself in hostile spiteful deeds
 Murders — taking someone’s life unlawfully”³

¹ Berg, p. 57

² Berg, p. 57

³ Berg, p. 57

4. Works of physical passion

“Drunkenness — intoxication
 Revellings — debauched, sensual parties”⁴

A version note concerning this list: two items have discrepancies in the manuscripts:

- The better mss. leave out ‘adultery’ – but it is a close synonym and subset of ‘fornication’
- Some of the better mss. leave out ‘murder’ – but it is one letter different from ‘envy’, so could be ‘slip of the eye’

Regardless, no one can disagree that these categories are evidently works of the flesh.

B. The works of the flesh as works

1. Thayer’s definition of ‘works’

- a. *“Business, employment, that with which anyone is occupied”*
- b. *“Any product whatever, anything accomplished by hand, art, industry, mind (equivalent to ποίημα, κτίσμα)”* [ποίημα – doings; κτίσμα – creations]
- c. *“An act, deed, thing done”*

2. These things, therefore, are...

- a. The things the flesh is busy at
- b. The things the flesh produces
- c. The things the flesh does

3. These works find their source in the flesh

- a. Not the body (material) as opposed to human spirit (immaterial) – later Gnostic views
- b. But the earthy, sensual, worldly, devilish nature of man: the passions
 - 1) This is all an unregenerate man has
 - 2) This is not eradicated when a man is regenerated – same passions play in his mind by habit and inclination

⁴ Berg, p. 57

- c. The works of the flesh tend to stimulate or excite the inner passions in such a way that men like the feeling they bring – it's the '*rush*' they look for... so they work to get it

Experiments have been done with lab animals where the animal is taught how to get a rush from drugs or some electrical implants by flipping a switch.

- Animals will give themselves entirely to flipping the switch, ignoring food and every thing else in order to get the rush.
- The works of the flesh are like this – a fulfillment of animal passions.

C. The works of the flesh as representative, not exhaustive

1. The list begins with a word that isn't clearly translated into English (19)
 - a. KJV: 'which are ...'
 - b. Other versions ignore the word
 - c. Lit.: 'whatever are fornication, etc. ...' or 'such things as are ...'
2. The list ends with a similar phrase, clearly translated: 'and such like' KJV ('and things like these' NAU) (21)

The phrases make it clear that this list doesn't cover everything the flesh does... there is much more than this...

II. Contrasting exhortations to the Spirit controlled life

The list is book-ended by exhortations towards the Spirit...

- A. Imperative: 'walk in the Spirit...' (16ff.)
- B. Indicative (statement of fact): 'the ones belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh' (24)
- C. Exhortation: 'let us walk in the Spirit' (25)

The way of life for the believer is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

- That is Spirit with a capital 'S'...
- That is the Holy Spirit of God, the second person of the Trinity

The Christian way of life is to be lived in an entirely different realm than the way of the sinful passions.

III. Deceptive working of fleshliness

- A. The works of the flesh are not confessed by Christians or professing Christians
1. Most of this list would be denied
 - a. Generally, the sexual sins would be denied (or equivocated, avoided, weaseled around in some way)
 - b. Almost to a man, all would deny idolatry and witchcraft
 - c. Murder? No way
 - d. Drunkenness? Carousing? No, not me
 2. Some of the sins of anger would be confessed – ‘well, yes, I do lose my temper...’
 - a. That is part of Paul’s point, by the way.
 - b. The sins of anger are as wicked as the rest.
- B. But remember, the list is representative
1. The works of the flesh are not simply confined to these specific things
 2. These specific works should be considered as categories themselves: remember ‘such things as...’ (19) and ‘and such like’ (21)
 - a. For example: no drunkenness
 - 1) Does that mean you can play around with alcohol up to the point at which you get drunk?
 - 2) What is the point of drunkenness, exactly?
 - b. For example: murder
 - 1) Our list gives 9 works in the category of anger, culminating in murder

2) Do you think any of the other categories allow 'a little bit' of idolatry, a 'dalliance' with fornication?

c. Consider the sexual sins

1) Broad categories here

2) Are such things as heavily suggestive movies, TV, literature covered by these categories?

I think we all know that they are, but very often Christians, and especially professing Christians, tell themselves that they are not.

C. When someone is playing around at the edges of these sins, what (or whose) desires are they following?

1. Their own fleshly lusts?

2. Or the Spirit's disciplined promptings and leadership?

Which is it?

Conclusion:

I set out in this message to make this point:

Proposition: The deceitfulness of the flesh is seen in the denial of the fleshliness of its works.

Don't think that you can live successfully by deceiving yourself that fleshliness in any way is acceptable or allowed by God.

- That which is of the flesh is flesh.
- That which is of the Spirit is Spirit.

Jesus said that in contrasting the new birth with the old birth.

If you are of the new birth, your spirit will be sickened by your struggle with the flesh.

If you have no new birth, your spirit will love your indulgence of the flesh.

And your flesh will always want more.