

Review Questions (Lesson #16)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. God has legislated against each of the works of the flesh in the New Testament only.
2. “Adultery” means all forms of sexually immoral activity.
3. Uncleanness in the New Testament has to do with sexual misconduct & is the opposite of holiness.
4. Idolatry was a big problem in the Old Testament, but Christians never struggle with it.
5. Sorcery refers to the use of mind-altering drugs in religious activities.

Give short answers:

1. What is the difference between “adultery” and “fornication”?
2. What is different about “uncleanness” in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament?
3. Besides bowing down to images, what are some examples of idolatry?
4. Why did pagans use mind-altering drugs in religious ceremonies?
5. Is the sexual appetite good or bad? Briefly explain:

Fill in the blanks:

1. Left to itself, the _____ will find _____ anywhere & in any way it can. Our _____ must rule over our _____ to keep us from falling into _____.
2. When the _____ rejects _____ & His _____, the person looks to other _____ for _____.
3. Engaging in _____ is inconsistent with having been _____ and _____ (made holy).
4. Those who refuse to _____ by the _____ find these teaching _____ and _____ and they usually _____ against them.
5. “Lewdness” describes _____ behavior that _____ & _____, anyone with a sense of _____.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #16 The Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)

People like stories where there is conflict between good and evil, and the good guys win! The Bible presents such a story, though we hasten to clarify that it is not a fictional account, but a true one. God created the universe. Satan spoiled it as Adam and Eve yielded to his temptation to sin. Jesus came to be the savior. Satan and his minions murdered Him. But God raised Him from the dead. The book of Revelation pictures the final victory of God and His faithful servants over Satan and all his forces of evil. The good guys win! But in the Bible, as in life, not everyone participates in the victory. In that spiritual tug-of-war that takes place within each of us, some surrender to the lusts of the flesh rather than walking by the Spirit. Such is common place in the world and, unfortunately, it plagues us in the church as well.

Paul wrote that “the works of the flesh are evident” (Galatians 5:19). The word “evident” comes from a root which means “light”; so this word means “brought to light” (i.e. clearly made known – the opposite of secret or hidden). Though some try to hide the works of the flesh, those works are commonly known. You can find most of them in today’s newspaper! They are so well-known that God has given specific legislation in both Testaments against every one of them. Those who refuse to “walk by the Spirit” find these teachings oppressive and burdensome, and they usually rebel against them.

The works of the flesh fall into three basic categories: sins of immorality (especially sexual sins), religious sins, and sins of disposition. First among the sexual sins is **adultery**: unlawful sexual relations involving a married person with someone other than that person’s spouse. The seventh of the Ten Commandments forbade adultery (Exodus 20:14), and the Law of Moses prescribed the death penalty for adulterers (Leviticus 20:10). In the New Testament, Hebrews 13:4 clearly states that God will judge (condemn) adulterers.

Next is **fornication**, a broader term than adultery. It actually includes adultery plus all other forms of sexually immoral behavior (e.g. premarital sex, incest, sodomy, and bestiality [sexual relations with animals]). Both Old and New Testaments are crystal clear in condemning such behavior (see Leviticus chapters 18 & 20; 1 Corinthians 6:13-18; Revelation 21:8). While the sexual appetite is God-given and good, it must be satisfied only within the context of God-approved marriage. Left to itself, the flesh will find fulfillment

anywhere and in any way it can. Our spirit must rule over our flesh to keep us from falling into sin.

The list continues with uncleanness. In the Old Testament, one could become ritually or ceremonially unclean in a variety of ways (e.g. by touching a dead body, Numbers 19:11). Ritual uncleanness involved no particular moral component. In the New Testament, however, the term has to do with sexual misconduct and is the opposite of holiness: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). Upon obeying the gospel, one is cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus and set apart from the sinful world to serve God. This is, by definition, sanctification (holiness). Engaging in uncleanness is inconsistent with having been cleansed and set apart (made holy). Would we take a laundered garment and deliberately soil it again? Then why do so with your soul?

Wrapping up the segment of sexual sins is lewdness (licentiousness, lasciviousness). This word describes outrageous, shameless, filthy behavior that shocks and offends anyone with a sense of moral decency. Tragically, many have been desensitized to outrageous filthiness. Abraham's nephew, Lot, was far from a shining example of virtue; but credit him with this: he "was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked" in Sodom, where his soul was tormented as he was "seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:7-8). But 21st-century America has become desensitized; thousands of homosexuals marching down Pennsylvania Avenue flaunting their filthiness scarcely brings so much as a raised eyebrow.

Paul included two religious sins among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). The first of those is idolatry. Worship of idols generally brings to mind bowing to images, and that is the gist of the word in both Old and New Testaments. The second of the Ten Commandments prohibited making images to bow down to them (Exodus 20:4-6). However, one can be guilty of idolatry without literally bowing down to an image. Paul wrote that covetousness (greed) is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). Devotion to material possessions constitutes idolatry because the possessions have become a god, replacing the true God. Israel was plagued with idolatry

throughout its history. Worship of idols also challenged the New Testament church as converts from pagan backgrounds struggled to overcome their past. Thus the apostle John urged his readers, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Humans are, by nature, worshipping beings. When the flesh rejects God and His will, something else will fill the void. That something might be an image to which one bows down. It might be material possessions. It might be selfish desires (Philippians 3:19). Some idolize what they call "science" (not the genuine pursuit of knowledge, but the worldly philosophy which insists that the material universe is all that exists; God and all things spiritual are devoutly ignored).

Sorcery joins idolatry as a religious sin that is a work of the flesh. The KJV uses "witchcraft," but it has nothing to do with women flying around on broomsticks! The word Paul used for "sorcery" ("pharmakeia") gives us our word pharmacy. This New Testament word does not mean the dispensing of medicines to treat health conditions. Rather, it refers first to the use of mind-altering drugs in religious activities. These substances were supposed to put the users into contact with the spirit world. Thus the word came to be used to refer to everything from astrology to incantations, spells, and séances (communication with the dead).

Sorcery was a capital offense under the Law of Moses (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27). Revelation 21:8 lists sorcerers among those who have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (i.e. Hell). When the flesh rejects God and His word, the person looks to other sources for guidance. Through Moses God told Israel: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 18:10-13). That word "blameless" means "complete"; God's design was for His people to be complete in Him and His word. They needed no help from Satan and his spiritual forces of darkness.

In the next lesson we will continue our treatment of the works of the flesh by looking at sins that relate to our disposition (attitude) and three other sins of immorality.