

Crucified Flesh

Galatians 5:16-24

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 2, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The works of the flesh are obvious. Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, zeal, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, divisions, factions, jealousies, drunkennesses and carousing.

All of these works of the flesh are rooted in selfishness. That is why they are works of the flesh. If anyone practices these things, he is fulfilling the lust of the flesh. While the lust of the flesh surely includes fornication which is listed here in several forms, it also includes idolatry.

Make no mistake idolatry is selfishness, but it is selfishness cloaked in religious garb. A person who worships an idol rather than the true God is trying to avoid the true God in order to fulfill some selfish lust of the flesh. He invents an idol that allows him to do what he wants. In this way while he is worshipping his idol he can claim to be religious and devout while at the same time fulfilling the lusts of his flesh. And make no mistake about it some who worship idols invent an idol and call it "Jesus" because they know that is the name of the true God. While he may call his idol "Jesus" it is not Jesus in fact. That is why 2Corinthians warns us against a Jesus other than the real Jesus. Such people who worship a false Jesus will go to church every Sunday, but they do not worship the real Jesus. They worship the Jesus that lets them do what they want. This is licentiousness. This is idolatry. This is the lust of the flesh.

In addition to fornication fits of anger are also forbidden. In fact enmity, strife, zeal, fits of rage, divisions, factions, jealousies occupy more of the list of the lusts of the flesh than do fornication, licentiousness, and impurity. Any kind of fit of rage or threat of violence is a lust of the flesh. It is selfish in the extreme. In fact our anger reveals just how selfish we really are. We do not get what we want and so we get angry. If we could get away with murder, we would do it. We are angry and so we gossip and slander. When the gossip and slander gets around the person about whom we gossiped finds out about it and they get angry. Then they gossip and slander the person who gossiped and slandered them. Then people take sides on who is right and who is wrong often favoring the person with whom they happen to be talking at the time. Then whatever group it is, whether it is a congregation, a family, a community, a club, it is divided. Once such a division occurs the people who oppose each other try to justify their own positions. They have great zeal that they are right. They are afraid every time someone expresses to them that their opponent may be right. They have zeal and they dismiss whatever idea or opinion disagrees with their own. They want to win the argument. They have a selfish ambition to win the fight. They want to be the savior of the congregation, the family, the community, the club, the organization. And if only everyone would just listen to him, all would be well and they would thank him and praise him for his good ideas. And all it is is selfish ambition. The result is factions, divisions, and fits of rage. All of it is the lust of the flesh.

Drunkenness is just another form of idolatry. Someone cannot handle his problems and does not have the courage to face them and so he drinks. He drinks to dull the pain that he has. He drinks to take away the thoughts that bother him. When he drinks he can kill his thinking just enough that he does not have to think about the things that give him pain. He expects the drink to save him from his pain. It is idolatry in the end. He is trusting in alcohol rather than trusting in God to save him from his troubles. The drink is an easy god. It is a legal god. It gives a man courage when he is a coward. It makes a fool of him when he speaks with it. That is the sacrifice that the false god of the drink requires.

And finally carousing. The ESV translates the term “orgies.” While that may be accurate “orgies” in English almost always suggests fornication. The Greek term listed here does not emphasize fornication so much as it emphasizes overeating. And so gluttony is a better translation. Some have asked me recently about where God condemns gluttony. Well, here it is. Gluttony like alcohol can serve as a means to hide from one’s problems and therefore to depend on it to save from your problems. But food is not a savior. Food is not a god. Food is a gift of God to support and maintain the body.

Anyone who practices these things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. If you want a straight ticket into hell, practice these things and you will go there.

Then there are the fruits of the Spirit.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.

The love to which God is referring is a self sacrificing love that puts the neighbor’s needs ahead of one’s own needs. As such it will sacrifice for the sake of the neighbor. Also such love will give the neighbor what the neighbor needs and not what the neighbor wants. The neighbor may be practicing the works of the flesh and fulfilling the lusts thereof. True love will not allow the neighbor to continue in the works of the flesh. If you truly love your neighbor, you will warn him against his fornication, his impurity, his licentiousness, his idolatry, his sorcery. You will warn your neighbor against enmity, strife, zeal, fits of rage, selfish ambition, divisions, factions, jealousies, drunkenness, and gluttony. If you do not warn your neighbor against these things or if you oppose those who are warning your neighbor against these things, then you do not love your neighbor and you yourself are not bearing the fruit of the spirit.

The kindness about which God speaks in this passage is the same way. Kindness is not the same thing as niceness. Niceness allows the neighbor to do what the neighbor wants. That is being nice. Being nice hopes that the neighbor will not want something for himself that is harmful. A person who is nice will say nothing while his neighbor engages in fornication, impurity, licentiousness, sorcery, idolatry, enmity, strife, zeal, fits of rage, divisions, factions, jealousies, drunkenness, and gluttony. A nice person does not warn his neighbor away from these things because it is not nice to criticize someone. A nice person is nice to others so that they will be nice to him and not criticize him when he wants to engage in works of the flesh.

The kindness about which God speaks is a kindness that acknowledges the world the way that God made it. That means that occasionally the kind person out of kindness will warn a

person who wants to fulfill the lusts of the flesh against the lusts of the flesh. A kind person knows that if his neighbor continues to practice the works of the flesh the neighbor will not inherit the kingdom of God. He will go to hell. So the kind neighbor warns his neighbor against the practices of the lust of the flesh so that his neighbor will not inherit the kingdom of God. After all what use were you to your neighbor if you allowed him to get away with the lusts of the flesh so that you and he could get along in this life if in the next life God only cast him into hell. Wouldn't you be more useful to him in this life by warning him against these things and risking temporal conflict with him so that on the day of the Lord he may be saved?

Faith is always a fruit of the Spirit. Can't have faith without the Spirit.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and this is why the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other. Self-control is the exact opposite of licentiousness. Therefore the man who has self-control does not engage in fornication. He can control himself. He is not impure. He does not engage in sorcery or idolatry. He does not engage in fits of rage or slander or gossip. He does not create factions and divisions. He is not jealous nor zealous for anything except that which is good. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit because without the Spirit self-control would be impossible.

The law is not against the fruits of the Spirit.

If law is not against the fruits of the Spirit and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. Then the law must be against the works of the flesh. If the law is against the works of the flesh then those who engage in the works of the flesh are disobeying the law. That would mean that those who produce the fruits of the Spirit are keeping the law. But then those who engage in the works of the flesh and practice them will not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore those who keep the law inherit the kingdom of God. But didn't God say last Sunday that the inheritance came by the promises and not by the law?

In fact He did. And not only did He do it through the same Saint Paul. He did it in the same book of Galatians!

So is this a contradiction where in one passage God says that salvation is by His promise and not by His law and in another passage he says that salvation is by law and not by a promise?

How do we resolve the contradiction? Well, we don't. Rather God reveals to us what we have misunderstood and we have misunderstood much.

Here is what we have misunderstood.

We believe, incorrectly, that repentance is something that we do.

The entire Lutheran Reformation was sparked by this simple realization. Martin Luther realized that repentance is something that we are and not something that we do. It is unfortunate that those who claim to be the heirs of Luther have lost this simple realization.

Because we think that repentance is something that we do instead of something that we are, we believe that we have to ask for forgiveness in order to be forgiven. While asking for forgiveness will procure forgiveness, God will also forgive you of sins for which you did not

ask for forgiveness. Because we think that repentance is something that we do rather than something that we are, we think that suicide is an unforgiveable sin and we don't care what the Lord says when He says that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the only unforgivable sin. We have made suicide unforgivable on our own authority and we have ignored the authority of the Lord Himself. We are in terrible danger. We are in danger of the fire of hell itself. The reason that we think that suicide is unforgivable is because the person who commits suicide has done something for which he cannot ask for forgiveness. He is dead. But that presupposes that repentance is something that we do and not something that we are. If repentance is something that we do then our salvation is not by grace through faith, it is through works. We have to repent or we are going to hell. That is salvation by works. It is of the devil and we must repent of it. Thinking of repentance as something that we do, leads us to trust in ourselves and in our repenting and not in Jesus Christ. And therefore thinking that repentance is something that we do and not something that we are is faithless. We are certainly not Lutherans. We are barely Christians.

As long as you continue to think that repentance is something that you do passages like Galatians, chapter six, read together with Galatians, chapter five, will make no sense. One tells you that the inheritance comes by the promises. The other tells you that inheritance comes by the law and what you are supposed to believe? Are the Law and the promises opposed to each other? Certainly not. You have simply misunderstood repentance.

Repentance is not something that you do. Repentance is something that you are. When our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Repent," the translations should say, "Be penitent." And as we observed last Sunday when God commands something, His commandment creates what it commands. God creates you into penitent people.

He promises you the forgiveness of your sins and when He promises you the forgiveness of your sins, He is promising you righteousness. Since His promise creates what it promises, you have been made righteous. That is to say that you have been made from a sinner into a righteous person. What other fruit would a righteous person bear other than the fruits of the Spirit? It would never occur to a righteous person to engage in the works of the flesh.

And so Galatians, chapter six, says that those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh. You have crucified the flesh. It is dead.

That does not mean that you have turned over a new leaf. That does not mean that you have checked into rehab and repatterned your life. That does not mean that you have changed your habits. Your flesh will always try to make a comeback. It means that the flesh with its lusts is dead. If it isn't dead, then you will practice the works of the flesh. But you are of Christ and therefore your flesh and its lusts are dead. You crucified them because you are of Christ.

That is why the Bible says things in terms of your person and not in terms of rules and regulations. You people keep asking me, "Is it wrong to do this?" or "Is it wrong to do that?" My land how can you ask me these things? Have you not crucified the flesh? Are you still thinking according to the fundamental elements of the world, "Do not touch! Do not taste!" Are you still thinking like unbelievers and pagans? Haven't you matured in your thinking?

Jesus tells Nicodemus and by telling Nicodemus He also tells you, "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus does not say unless a man do this or do that He cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus does not say unless a man pray and ask for forgiveness he cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus does not say a man may sin so many times and then once he exceeds a certain number he is no longer penitent. Jesus says, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus is talking about a whole new you.

The holy and blessed apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. It is not that we were sinners. Of course, we were sinners. It is that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. And then the apostle of Jesus Christ tells us that God made us alive together with Christ. Once you have been made alive from your trespasses and sins, there is a brand new you.

The holy and blessed apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ has said it plainly, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come." It is a brand new you.

And here in Galatians God is not telling you to shape up. God is not telling you, "Do better!" God is not urging you to keep track of your works of flesh and your fruits of the Spirit to make sure that you have more fruits of the Spirit than you do works of the flesh. He is telling you that the flesh with its lusts is crucified. It is dead. It has no more power over you. You are free from its slavery. You are free from its power. You are not helpless. You have the Spirit. You do not have to sin. You are free to bear the fruits of the Spirit.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.