

THE EIGHT SOCIAL SINS OF THE FLESH: GALATIANS 5:20-21

(According to the English Standard Version)

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Enmity (Hatred, Hostile feelings): In this context, “hostile feelings and actions” best represent Paul’s idea.¹ The false teachers who had infiltrated the churches of Galatia were antagonistic toward Paul and anyone else who resisted their law-oriented gospel, which created a hostile atmosphere within the churches. Hence believers were biting and devouring one another, “provoking one another” to fight, and making personal attacks on one another. A hostile mentality seeks personal revenge and returns evil deed for evil deed. What an outright contradiction such hostility is to the “new commandment” to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35) and to love one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43-48)! The Holy Spirit does not lead believers to become hateful of one another.

Strife (Discord, Contention): The term is defined as “engagement in rivalry, especially with reference to positions taken in a matter, *strife, discord, contention*.”² Strife destroys harmony; it promotes sinful, contentious quarreling. In fact, the last of the seven deadly sins is sowing “discord among brothers” (Prov. 6:19). Instead of strife, the Holy Spirit produces “joy” and “peace.” (See Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9)

Jealousy: Here is a sinful, self-centered disposition that causes endless tensions between people. It is an intense feeling of resentment or hostility toward what others possess or successes or advantages they enjoy. At its worst, jealousy can drive people to hate and even murder. (See Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; James 3:14, 16)

Fits of anger: Sinful, out-of-control anger is extremely damaging to relationships and community life. The Spirit creates long-temperedness and “self-control,” not destructive rage. (See 2 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; James 1:19)

Rivalries (Selfish ambitions): Also translated “selfish ambitions,” the word denotes self-seeking without regard for the interests of others or at the expense of others. It is a self-seeking attitude that is contentious, competitive, factious, and divisive. This sinful vice is often manifested by power plays, fights for control, and manipulation of people. It is the opposite of humbly serving the interests of others and counting “others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3-5). (See Phil. 1:17; James 3:14, 16)

Dissensions: The introduction of false teaching into the churches of Galatia inevitably caused controversy, which resulted in widely differing opinions and warring factions among the believers. Dissensions are manifest in bitter arguing, gossip, and “provoking one another, envying one another.” (See Rom. 16:17)

Divisions: Dissensions quickly create contending factions and an “us versus them” mentality. Factionalism is not the work of the Spirit but of the flesh and the devil. Because factionalism is a result of the flesh and the devil, one of Paul’s greatest fears was that the churches would divide into warring factions who were bitterly hostile to one another. (See Mark 3:25; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Peter 2:1)

¹BDAG, 419

²BDAG, 392

Envy: Envy is a selfish desire to possess what others have or advantages they enjoy. It is the cause of a great deal of fighting and resentment as it drives people to speak evil of others, to find fault, to maliciously tear down others, and to gloat over the failures and tragedies of others. The Spirit-directed believer, however, is to be marked by “kindness” and “goodness” rather than envy (See Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:1).

THE EIGHT SOCIAL SINS OF THE FLESH: 2 CORINTHIANS 12:20 **(According to the English Standard Version)**

Quarreling: The same Greek word as in Galatians 5:20 but rendered as “strife.”

Jealousy: The same Greek word as in Galatians 5:20.

Anger: The same Greek word as in Galatians 5:20 but rendered as “fits of anger.”

Hostility: The same Greek word as in Galatians 5:20 but rendered as “rivalries.”

Slander (Evil Speaking): “Slander” is speaking evil of others in a way that defames and damages their character (see also 1 Peter 2:1). Using the verb form of this same word, James warns: “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers” (James 4:11). Slandering is bearing false witness against another. Slanderers divide people and shatter the peace and unity of the church family.

Gossip (Tale-bearing, Whisperings): Like slander, gossip disregards truth. It traffics in rumors and secrets. Gossip divides people, defames character, and distorts reality. It perpetuates unrest and distrust among members of a congregation. It is another sinful spoiler of the congregation’s peace and unity. Paul knew from deep personal experience the painful stings of slander and gossip.

Conceit: The word used here for “conceit” carries the idea of inflated or puffed up. The Corinthians had a spiritual superiority complex. They prided themselves on knowledge and giftedness. The verb form appears six times in the letter of 1 Corinthians.³ Conceit is the opposite disposition of Christlike humility and servanthood. Pride is a root cause to most conflicts and a chief barrier to resolving conflict.

Disorder (Disorders, Unruliness): The Corinthians were an unruly, independent-minded group of Christians. In many ways, they acted like unruly children. They did not submit well to authority or to one another (see James 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:33; Luke 21:9). The result was a lack of peace and harmony and orderly conduct in their congregational meetings.

³“Conceit,” from the noun *phusiosis*, “inflated/bloated condition...swelled-headedness, *pride, conceit*” (BDAG, 1070). The verb form, *phusioō*, is found in 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4.

THE SIN OF JEALOUSY

One of the biggest instigators of human conflict is envy and jealousy. This sinful vice deserves special comment.

It is important to observe that after listing two positive qualities of love, patience and kindness (1 Cor. 13:4), Paul lists eight sinful vices that are totally incompatible with love: envy, boasting in self, arrogant self-superiority, rudeness, selfishness, quick-temperedness, resentfulness, delighting in the misery of others. *These sinful vices express the self-centered life that tears apart relationships and causes and accentuates conflict.* These self-centered sins thrived in Corinth. *Self-interest dominated the church.* These same self-centered sins generate conflict in churches today and in our personal relationships. Heading the vice list is envy.

In his lectures at Yale University, theologian John Claypool mentions his own experience as a seminary student attending his denominational conventions at which he was repeatedly disturbed by the petty jealousies and rivalries he saw among ministers of the denomination:

I can still recall going to state and national conventions in our denomination and coming home feeling drained and unclean, because most of the conversation in the hotel rooms and the halls was characterized by envy of those who were doing well or scarcely concealed delight for those who were doing poorly. For did that not mean that someone was about to fall, and thus create an opening higher up on the ladder?⁴

A church I am acquainted with was being torn to pieces by petty jealousies among choir members. Two members were fighting over which of them should be choir director. One angrily threatened to leave the church if the other was appointed director. One man was resentful that another got to sing lead part more than he. Some parents were hurt because their adult children were turned down from joining the choir while the children of others, not so well liked, were included. Some musicians resented others who were more favored. There was lots of petty bickering about unfairness and not being properly recognized. Self-interest and small-minded jealousy dominated the choir and caused division in the congregation.

Jealousy has wrecked countless relationships and poisoned many churches. The Bible says jealousy is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20) and “demonic” (James 3:15). It is one of the first expressions of the self-centered, self-absorbed heart and one of the chief sins of discord. The problem with envy is that it leads to many other evils: a critical spirit, personal misery, sinister gossip, gloating over others’ downfall, resentfulness, paranoia, and divisive competition.

Love is the biblical corrective to envy and jealousy. “Love does not envy” (1 Cor. 13:4). Love promotes and delights in the good of the other person. Love is large-hearted, other-oriented, and full of good will towards others. Radio Bible teacher and author, John MacArthur, observes that, “When love sees someone who is popular, successful, beautiful, or talented, it is glad for them and never jealous or envious.”⁵

When you sense jealousy in your heart, don’t excuse it. Confess it as sin and seek forgiveness and victory over this “demonic” force within (James 3:14-15). Peter directs his readers and us to consciously and deliberately “put away all...envy” in order to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22; 2:1).

Purpose in your heart, then, to always rejoice at the successes and blessings others’ experience. Practice encouraging and praising others when you see God’s goodness evidenced in their giftedness and work. Help promote their work and giftedness. Desire the best for others, not their downfall.

⁴John R. Claypool, *The Preaching Event* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980), 68.

⁵John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 340.

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