

# Fifteen gross sins are listed religion essay



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Brenda - It certainly does. Seriously, though, working at a reference desk has to be a bit intimidating. After all, anyone is allowed to ask you any question, and you are supposed to be able to find the answer! So, I guess one of the qualifications for the job is that you have to be omniscient! That would leave us all out.

But there is someone who is qualified, someone who knows "all the answers". In Revelation 2 and 3, Christ includes in each of the letters to the seven churches the words "I know your works". God knows us. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows our needs. He knows the answer to every question in our heart. He is the ultimate "reference desk worker".

## **GNB**

What a great God we serve and worship! And we on Word Alive are privileged to be able to share the information of God with you. Thank you for joining us today.

Dr Derek Stringer is our communicator - and Derek has been taking us through the amazing letter of Paul to the Galatians. We've reached the fifth chapter and verses 19 to 21.

## **DS**

And I hope that you'll not be put off if I say that this information is some of the most discouraging in the entire Bible, but also one of the most realistic.

## **GNB**

Let's look at Galatians 5: 19 to 21 -

“ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Derek!

**DS**

Brenda, thank you.

On the surface it is hard to imagine anything more depressing and discouraging than these three verses. Fifteen gross sins are listed, followed by a strong warning that those who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**GNB**

And some of you may be wondering, “ Is he really going to devote an entire message to these three verses? Why not combine them with the next three, which speak of the fruit of the Spirit. Then at least something uplifting and positive might result.”

**DS**

Well, we’re going to get to verses 22-23 next time, and I think after enduring the sourness of today’s text, the fruit of the Spirit will taste much sweeter. Before digging into the detail, however, I think there are a few general observations we need to make by way of an overview of the SIN or the S. I. N. Virus - that stands for SERIOUSLY IN NEED virus!

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## **First, I want us to consider why Paul included this list of sins here in the book of Galatians.**

One reason seems to me to be an issue of balance.

Paul's strong advocacy of grace as a life principle and his severe attacks against legalism could lead some to take sin lightly. These verses enable him to communicate not only that there are moral principles even for those living under grace, but also that persistent violation of the boundaries God has set, has severe, even eternal consequences.

Some old writers knew the truth of this.

Thomas Merton for example:

“ The reason we never enter into the deepest reality of our relationship with God is that we so seldom acknowledge our utter nothingness before Him.”

### **GNB**

As George MacDonald:

“ To be ashamed is a holy and blessed thing. Shame is shame only to those who want to appear, not to those who want to be. Shame is shame to those who want to pass their examination, not to those who would get to the heart of things. To be humbly ashamed is to be plunged in the cleansing bath of truth.”

### **DS**

And then - In addition, it is one thing to know in general that there is a conflict between the sinful nature and the Spirit. It is quite another thing to

be given a list of fifteen specific examples of the acts of the sinful nature and then a list of the fruit of the Spirit. God doesn't leave us wondering about the real difference between a life lived after the flesh and one lived after the Spirit.

Furthermore, all of us are interested enough in saving face that, without such a list we would tend to think of the acts of the sinful nature only in terms of deeds we personally have not committed. And we would focus only on the fruit of the Spirit that seem to have counterparts in our own personalities. But these lists force us to face the fact that everyone of us has an active sinful nature, and everyone of us has room for major cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Also by way of overview I think we should take note of Paul's comment to the effect that "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious." Obvious to whom? Apparently to anyone who is objective and honest.

## **GNB**

In the past 25 years our modern culture has made great efforts to deny that many of these acts are even wrong. ("sinful," of course, is not even in the culture's vocabulary). Sexual activity outside of marriage, for example, is considered by many modern psychotherapists, politicians, and even clergy to be perfectly acceptable. Standards not acceptable a few years ago are now routinely labelled a natural alternative lifestyle. Those who deal with drug addiction and alcoholism insist their clients are merely suffering from a disease.

## **DS**

But the Scriptures deem all such behaviour to be acts of the sinful nature, (though certainly sin can, and often does, lead to disease).

The media treats astrology as a harmless and perhaps even helpful way for people to find order in a chaotic world, but Paul says it, too, is an act of the sinful nature. Even we evangelicals play this game when we consider jealousy, envy, and a bad temper to be minor indiscretions or personality flaws we can't help, while God lumps such things together with idolatry and orgies, and calls them all the acts of the sinful nature.

You know - we can justify, excuse, and rationalise all we want, but despite all our efforts to hide the truth, the acts of the flesh are obvious. No matter how we dress them up, they are sin, and we know it in our hearts.

## **GNB**

Now let's take the time to examine the acts of the sinful nature one by one, as enumerated by the Apostle.

## **DS**

There are 15 deeds mentioned here in the NIV, 17 in the KJV, which adds adultery and murder. These two are not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts of our text and were probably added by a later scribe who thought two sins as nasty as adultery and murder surely deserved a place in Paul's list.

The list, of course, was not meant to be exhaustive, and whether or not Paul himself wrote "adultery" and "murders," he undoubtedly included them in

the et cetera at the end of the list. As a matter of fact, virtually the entire Ten Commandments are missing from this list, though they also certainly deal with notorious acts of the sinful nature.

Bible scholars often divide this list into four parts: sexual sins, religious sins, social sins, and sins related especially to alcohol.

## **GNB**

There are the sexual sins.

## **DS**

The first vice in the list is Immorality.

The Greek word used here is the term porneia, from which we get our English word, pornography. It is a broad term which signifies sexual perversion in general. Almost any sexual act outside marriage would be included. Sin of this kind was so common in Paul's day that it was almost taken for granted. Even believers were not particularly shocked by it. I fear that we are fast approaching the same degree of apathy to sexual looseness in our own day.

We are living in a sex-saturated society. Most major television programmes are built around a theme of sexual promiscuity, to say nothing of the best-seller list of fiction books or leading magazines or Oscar-nominated movies. And all this is impacting the church.

I remember a magazine article entitled, " Sex and the Single Evangelical." It contends the church is in denial about how its single evangelicals are having sex (which may be true), but then she goes on to suggest that the

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prohibition on premarital sex is just a church tradition, and is essentially unaddressed in Scripture. Frankly, I don't know how they can square that with the whole tenor of Scripture, to say nothing of specific passages like 1 Corinthians 6.

However, with all these voices "out there" advocating sexual freedom, plus our inherent tendency toward the desires of the sinful nature, there is virtually no doubt there are individuals listening to me today who are right now living a double life of godliness on Sunday and immorality during the week. Perhaps there is someone who is presently carrying on an affair with a colleague at work. Almost certainly in a group as large as the group listening to me right now - well - there are some caught in the vice-grip of wrong actions. I would not even be surprised if there is a parent who is sexually abusing a child or a stepchild.

Please, please - don't pretend to be shocked-if this happened at Corinth and at Galatia, then it also happens at our Church. But while acknowledging the fact that it is happening, we dare not take a blasé attitude toward it. Please be informed that those who practice such things, according to this very passage, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. They are not destined for heaven. That's what God says.

But possibly some of you have never been guilty of an explicit sexual sin. You are still not necessarily off the hook.

For the second vice mentioned is Impurity.



It refers to a filthiness of heart and mind that corrupts and defiles a person. The impure person sees dirt in everything.

## **GNB**

Double-entendres are his forte. He is described in Titus 1: 15: " To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." The impure person is also described in 2 Peter 2: 14 as one " having eyes full of adultery."

## **DS**

You know - Many Christian men who wouldn't think of having an actual affair, nevertheless think nothing of walking down the street with their eyes at breast level.

We men in particular need to be so careful what we read, what we watch, and especially what websites we visit on the computer.

If you find yourself susceptible to temptation, flee as Joseph did. A simple way to flee internet temptation is to use an internet provider with an adequate filtering system.

But women, too, are not exempt. Filling your minds with romance novels and soap operas are equivalent to saturating yourself with impurity. If it's filthy, it's not of the Spirit; it's an act of the sinful nature, and those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

The third vice in the sexual area, Debauchery or sensuality is a broad term covering everything from provocative clothing to shameless disregard for public decency.

Sensuality is the byword for the bulk of advertising done in our country today. The clothing industry thrives on it, as does the entertainment industry, the travel industry, and the music industry. In denouncing sensuality, Paul is not suggesting that beauty and attractiveness are out of bounds for Christian people. But everyone of us knows in our hearts the difference between beauty and sensuality-it's the difference between Michelangelo's statue of David and the Playgirl centrefold. You can stand next to that incredible statue of David in Florence, in the presence of dozens of men, women, and children, with no sense of shame-only awe. It exudes beauty, not sensuality.

## **GNB**

Paul's first three entries among the acts of the sinful nature should not be interpreted as implying a negative attitude toward sex.

## **DS**

That's so right - Sexuality is God-given and beautiful, but when exercised outside the bounds of marriage, it can be incredibly self-destructive. And those who practice sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery (or sensuality) shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

## **GNB**

Next there are the religious sins.

**DS**

Idolatry.

There are many places in the Bible where idolatry is ridiculed.

**GNB**

In the 44th chapter of Isaiah the prophet says, " All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. . . . He cuts down cedars, or perhaps a cypress or oak. . . . Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, " Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, " Save me; you are my god." They know nothing. They understand nothing; ; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand."

**DS**

But the worship of idols involves not only graven images but also any substitute for the living and true God.

**GNB**

In Colossians 3: 5 covetousness is described as a form of idolatry, because the thing coveted becomes an object of worship.

**DS**

The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car, house or boat than he does to serving Christ may be in danger of idolatry.

We are commanded in Scripture to worship God, love people, and use things; but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God completely out of the picture. The important thing to note here is that false worship is every bit as much a work of the sinful nature as adultery. And those who practice idolatry shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The second religious act of the sinful nature is Witchcraft or sorcery.

The Greek word Paul uses here is the one from which we get our English word "pharmacy." It referred to the use of drugs to poison people, as well as in witchcraft. Magic and sorcery were extremely common in Asia Minor, where the Galatian churches were located.

## **GNB**

In Acts 19: 19 we read that due to Paul's ministry in nearby Ephesus, "A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas."

## **DS**

The Bible forbids anything related to magic, fortune-telling, astrology or contact with the spirit world. Perhaps a specific comment relative to astrology and horoscopes would be in order, since many people are conned into thinking it is a harmless and sometimes even helpful way to plan for the future and to make decisions. At best it is a foolish waste of time and money. More often it is a subtle trap that Satan uses to undermine one's faith in

God's active sovereignty over human affairs. At worst it makes one vulnerable to demonic influences.

## **GNB**

Let me quote just one of many passages in the Bible that speak to this issue. I'm reading from Deuteronomy 18: " When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who . . . practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord."

## **DS**

Those who practice idolatry and witchcraft or sorcery will not inherit the kingdom of God. So much for the religious sins. The social sins are more numerous.

If the first two categories didn't get you, then this one probably will, for the vices listed here are very common, even among professing Christians. But they're no less serious just because they're common.

Hatred refers to hostility between individuals or communities, whether on social, political, racial, or religious grounds.

The attitude of those who stir up racial hatred is here. So is hatred for gays, for abortionists, and even for politicians. One can disagree strongly with a person's view or lifestyle, but hatred of that person is forbidden.

The second act of the sinful nature that fits in the social realm, or perhaps I should say “ anti-social” realm is Discord.

This is the natural result when hatred is acted upon. Whether the discord occurs in Northern Ireland or Jerusalem or London, it is the end result of hatred.

## **GNB**

Some homes are characterised by discord, as the hatred and contempt of one family member for another boils over in fighting and feuding.

## **DS**

But interestingly, four out of the six times Paul uses this word in his epistles, it is connected with church life. Some churches, unfortunately, are characterised by strife. Fights and splits are typical fare, and the world watches and wonders, “ Is this what Christianity is all about?”

I prayed all my ministry life that God would spare the church I pastored from the discord that leads to a church split. God was gracious and answered that prayer.

The next act mentioned is the word Jealous.

And it’s not always a vice. In fact, God is called a jealous God in the Scriptures and even gives as one of His names, “ Jealous.”

## **GNB**

And we are urged to be jealous for God’s honour and for God’s name.

## **DS**

But here it is obvious the intention is to speak of selfish jealousy, that attitude which resents the success enjoyed by someone else. This, too, occurs in the church, when one person is asked to do a ministry that someone else wanted, or when one member has an unusual degree of success in business.

Then there are Fits of rage.

Losing one's temper and blowing a gasket are not excusable because your hair is red or because someone around you is especially irritating or because "that's just the way you are." It's a work of the sinful nature, and those that practice outbursts of anger shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Another act of the sinful nature in social situations is Selfish ambition.

The term used here signifies a mercenary spirit which withholds ministry or service from someone if there isn't enough money in it. Pastors who choose speaking engagements solely on the basis of where the larger honoraria are given are guilty of this vice.

## **GNB**

A cartoon in Leadership Journal years ago showed a Christian musician standing before an adoring audience about to sing a beautiful worship song he had written himself. The caption has him saying something like this: "The Lord gave me this song, and if anyone uses it without my permission, I'll sue you."

**DS**

A spirit of selfish ambition, to be sure. But so is the attitude of a layperson who refused to serve in the church because it would interfere with his moneymaking ability.

The next word is Dissensions.

It's a term with strong doctrinal overtones, and refers principally to the introduction of divisive teaching in the church.

**GNB**

The legalists in Galatia were a prime example.

**DS**

And there are many in the church today who are teaching doctrines, some absolutely false and others just distortions, which keep people from focusing on truths that exalt Christ and build up believers.

In fact, I believe even solid truth can sometimes be taught in a way that produces dissension. The doctrine of election, for example, is a doctrine I highly value, but if it is not taught carefully, it can be unnecessarily divisive.

The next word (Number 12) is Factions.

It goes a step further than dissensions. In fact, it is the natural result of divisive teaching, in that a party spirit develops and the Body of Christ is split into groups-one of which champions a particular teacher or leader, while another champions someone else.



## **GNB**

Paul experienced this in Corinth, where he chided the church with these words:

One of you says, " I follow Paul"; another, " I follow Apollos"; another, " I follow Cephas"" still another (and this was the super-spiritual group), " I follow Christ."

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul"

## **DS**

I believe cliques are a common manifestation of this vice of factions. Oh, how we need to be careful not to isolate ourselves with our little group of friends! Nothing will destroy the spirit of unity in a church more quickly.

Young people, this includes you. Sometimes youth groups are extremely difficult for new kids to break into because of the cliques that exist. It's an act of the sinful nature.

Next - Envy is closely related to the earlier concept of jealousy, only this term, in contrast to jealousy, is always negative. It is the grudging spirit that cannot bear to contemplate someone else's prosperity.

## **GNB**

Christ gave a parable in which some of the workmen complained that the last-hired worker had been over- generously paid. The owner of the vineyard replied, " Do you begrudge my generosity?"

**DS**

Those guilty of envy do indeed.

Having examined the social sins that deal with interpersonal relations, let's consider two that are common to drinking alcohol.

Drunkenness is excessive indulgence in alcohol, which weakens one's rational and moral control over actions and words. There is undoubtedly less excuse for the abuse of alcohol in our society today than even in the Galatian society of the first century, for drinking wine in those days was almost essential, whereas today it is always by choice. No one today has to drink at all-the alternatives are numerous and often more healthy. The simple reason why abuse of alcohol is such a problem today is social pressure. Too many people think they'll stick out like a sore thumb if they ask for a soft drink.

But, you ask, can't one drink without abuse? Certainly, and many do. Drinking is not in itself a spiritual issue-drunkenness is-but drinking is certainly a social issue that must be examined carefully by Christian people.

Many need to ask the question, " Is the minor enhancement of life that moderate use of alcohol provides worth the major risk of abuse that so subtly and frequently results?" Remember that those who practice drunkenness will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Then he mentions Orgies or carousings which often accompany drunkenness.

In fact, rarely, do these occur without alcohol, for the lowering of one's natural inhibitions with alcohol is generally a pre-requisite before most people will even participate in grossly immoral behaviour.

## **GNB**

Fifteen vices have been listed.

## **DS**

But then the Apostle adds an "et cetera," for in verse 21 he ends his list with the phrase, "and the like." What he doesn't want us to do is to think of the acts of the sinful nature just in terms of these 15 vices, with the implication that if you avoid all 15 of these, you've got it made spiritually.

These are only representative of the kinds of actions that generate from our natural, in-born tendency toward sin.

## **GNB**

We need to hear this even if it's tough to do so - it's information from the Word of God here on Word Alive with Dr Derek Stringer. And we must also evaluate the acts of the sinful nature. And Derek will be back in a moment to help us do just that.

I just want to take this opportunity to let you know that we are praying for you our listener. If we can be of help spirituality well - that's what we're here for. Word Alive is not just about giving biblical information but seeing it lead to spiritual transformation. I give you our contact details in just a moment - but let me hand the microphone over to Derek Stringer as he wraps up this teaching from Galatians 5: 19 to 21. Over to Derek

## DS

Thanks again Brenda.

What we find at the conclusion of the Apostle's list is a severe warning. " I warn you," he says, " as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

The first thing we should ask is this: " To whom is this warning addressed?" Well, there's no question that Paul is talking to the professing Christians who were members of the churches of Galatia. Most of them were probably genuine believers, but as in any church, there were undoubtedly some who were just going through religious motions.

Many of these church members had come to Christ out of paganism, where their lives had been controlled by sinful habits. Some of them had practiced fornication as a religious duty in the pagan temples. Sorcery had been as common as weather forecasting. Naturally, not all of these nasty habits disappeared overnight when they professed faith in Christ. Some struggled with particular sinful addictions, or at least temptations, for some time.

I would like to suggest that it was because some of these former pagans were struggling that the Judaizers had been so successful in introducing their legalism into the churches.

I can just hear them say, " You Galatians have tried grace as a way of conquering your baser instincts; but the only sure way of putting a lid on sin is going back under the Law of Moses!" Paul, of course, disagrees strongly that the Law has any power to conquer such habits, but instead of reiterating

what he has already shared as the real answer (namely the life of grace as it is walked in the power of the Holy Spirit), he hits them with a stunning warning, namely that the Kingdom of God is not going to be populated by people who commit immoral deeds, hate other people, lose their tempers, or get drunk.

Now, if you're a normal, intelligent and inquisitive person, you probably are not willing to let the matter lie with that simple statement of Paul's theology. For numerous questions invade one's mind as to the meaning of this severe warning.

Does this verse teach that anyone who has ever committed one immoral act or gotten smashed or acted jealously is excluded forever from Heaven?

Or rather that those who do such things after conversion are excluded?

Or that those who do such things and refuse to repent are excluded?

Or that those who practice such things continually are excluded?

Probably most of us would tend to choose the latter option, because we are anxious to preserve one of our favourite doctrines-the security of the believer. I too agree with the last option, but not for that reason.

The Apostle is, in my estimation, fighting the very common tendency to divorce morality from religion.

## **GNB**

There are many who feel that what's important is just what people believe, not how they behave.

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**DS**

One or two of you may have even thought that's what I believe, for probably no fewer than a dozen times over the past programmes I have stated, " We are saved by believing, not by achieving." Yes, I said that, and I believe that, but I never said that behaviour is unimportant-just that it can never save you.

Anyone who thinks he can run around on his wife, get drunk at every office party, and practice road rage every night, and still go to Heaven so long as his beliefs are orthodox, has missed Paul's point regarding our freedom in Christ completely.

A Christian should never view his relationship with God as a free ticket to sin, but rather as a compulsion to forsake sin. Both our beliefs and our behaviour are important to God, and we dare not divorce them.

In fact, we can't divorce them, even if we try.

**GNB**

We behave the way we behave because we believe the way we believe.

**DS**

I think that's true. If we live sinful lives it's because we really don't believe God hates sin and that He will some day judge those who do it. We may say we believe it, but we really don't.

Now it's very important to pay attention to the verb used in v. 21:

## **GNB**

“ those who live like this.”

## **DS**

The word is in the present tense and is used often to mean “ practice.” This passage says that one whose life is characterized by these acts of the sinful nature will not inherit God’s Kingdom. It doesn’t matter what profession he has made. It doesn’t matter what aisles he has walked or at what altars he has kneeled. It doesn’t matter what spiritual experiences he has had or even whom he may have led to Christ. If these kinds of deeds describe his life-style, then he will not inherit the Kingdom of God, “ Thus says the Lord.” His attitudes and actions contradict the profession he makes that he has experienced the saving grace of God and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Would that when we meet one of these severe warnings of Scriptures we would not immediately ask, “ How does this fit with eternal security?,” but rather respond as Jesus’ disciples did when told that one of them would betray Him, “ Lord, is it I? Lord, are you talking about me?”

## **Finally, I would like to mention just a couple of implications of this severe warning.**

First, I do not believe anyone whose life is characterised by these acts of the sinful nature has the luxury of claiming to be a Christian. I am not the one to judge whether he’s saved, lost, or just backslidden, but I do say that he has no right to claim he’s a child of God when his life denies it. I have had individuals contact me, who were at the time living in gross sin, tell me, “

Well, at least I know I'm a Christian." And I have had to say, " I'm sorry, but I think that's blasphemy. You have no right to make such a claim while you're living like that."

A final implication is that while the entire book of Galatians has emphasised that we cannot inherit God's kingdom by works, verse 21 says in effect that we can bar ourselves from God's kingdom by works. Good works, in other words, can't get you into heaven, but works of the sinful nature can send you to Hell.

All around us are evil influences threatening to drown us in the actions of the sinful nature. But I find hope offered to us in the Word of God.

Brenda!

## **GNB**

In a very similar passage in 1 Corinthians 6 this same Apostle wrote, " Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

## **DS**

Notice the tense of that verb when he says, " And that is what some of you were." Paul would never have written, " And that is what some of you are,"



for “ Christian adulterer” is an oxymoron; so is “ Christian thief” and “ Christian drunk.” But the use of the past tense shows that God can turn people around.

The greatest thing about Christianity is that a personal relationship with Christ can turn a man’s present habits into history. There is no life too gross and too filled with the acts of the sinful nature that Jesus Christ can’t make a past tense out of it. The only person unredeemable is the one whose heart is too proud to seek God’s forgiveness.

## **GNB**

Are you one who is in need of the warning of this Scripture passage today?

## **DS**

Yes - Are you, as one who professes to be a Christian, involved in practicing one or more of these sins listed here? If so, your ultimate concern should not be to debate whether you real