

THE SEVEN HEAVENLY VIRTUES Galatians 5:13-26

A grandfather was talking to his grandson. "Grandson," he said, "there are two wolves living in my heart and they are at war with each other. One is vicious and cruel, the other is wise and kind." "Grandfather," said the alarmed grandson, "which one will win?" The grandfather paused before he said, "The one I feed."

The two warring wolves inside are Sin and Virtue. Last week we talked about the 7 Deadly Sins that represented categories for the sins that plague our lives (pride, greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth). This week, I want us to look at the 7 Heavenly Virtues (Contrary Virtues). Virtues are godly qualities of life, character and spiritual traits that are contrary or opposite the deadly sins. What virtues do you have as a result of being a Christian? If you are going to win the daily battle for your soul, you must join the Holy Spirit in cultivating the positive virtues of Christ in your life. Feed the wise wolf.

It is amazing to me that so many Christians quit growing, or don't know what to do as a Christian. Many do nothing. It's obvious. 1 Peter 1:2 says in the NIV that we "„have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood." Sanctification has always been one of the basic doctrines of Methodist and Wesleyan theology. Being sanctified means being "set apart" for God. God Himself is sanctifying us, making us holy, different, separate from the world by the way He changes us through godly virtues.

Christians through the ages have developed many lists of virtues that should reflect the Christian life. These 7 Contrary Virtues were derived from an epic poem, Psychomachia ("Battle for the Soul"), written by Prudentius (c. 410 AD). Practicing these virtues is alleged to protect one against temptation toward the Seven Deadly Sins: *humility* against pride, *kindness* against envy, *abstinence* against gluttony, *chastity* against lust, *patience* against anger, *liberality* against greed, and *diligence* against sloth. (7 Sins)

The Virtues I want to talk about this morning are 7 Heavenly Virtues that are opposites of the 7 Deadly Sins. Much of this information is from William Rushman's web site www.rushman.org/seven.

1)Humility (vs pride) - Seeing ourselves as we are and not comparing ourselves to others is humility. Pride and vanity are competitive. If someone else's pride really bothers you, you have a lot of pride. Philippians 2:3-5 says:

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus

2) Generosity (vs greed) – This is about more than money. Generosity means letting others get the credit or praise. It is giving without having expectations of the other person. Greed wants to get its "fair share" or a bit more. The use of money is still a good indicator of generosity. 1 Timothy 6:18-19 says:

¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

3) Love (vs envy) – Love actively seeks the good of others for their sake. Envy resents the good others receive or even might receive. Envy is almost indistinguishable from pride at times. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says:

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

4) Kindness (vs anger) – Kindness means taking the tender approach, with patience and compassion. Anger is often our first reaction to the problems of others. Impatience with the faults of others is related to this. Colossians 3:12 says:

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

5) Self-Control (vs lust) – (Chastity) – Self control and self mastery prevent pleasure from killing the soul by suffocation. Legitimate pleasures are controlled in the same way an athlete's muscles are: for maximum efficiency without damage. Lust is the self-destructive drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth. Sex, power, or image can be used well, but they tend to go out of control. Self-control is listed as one of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Fruit is what comes out in a person's life as a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is inside of you, you can have self-control over lust.

6) Temperance (vs gluttony) (Abstinence) – Temperance accepts the natural limits of pleasures and preserves this natural balance. This does not pertain only to food, but to entertainment and other legitimate goods, and even the company of others. Temperance means moderation, restraint, self-mastery, and sobriety. 2 Peter 1:5-7 (KJV) “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

7) Zeal (vs sloth) - Zeal is the energetic response of the heart to God's commands. The other sins work together to deaden the spiritual senses so we first become slow to respond to God and then drift completely into the sleep of complacency. Romans 12:11 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the

Lord.” Psalm 69:9 “Zeal for thy house consumes me.” True zeal is informed through prayer, Scripture, good counsel and fellowship so that it does not violate the Word of God.

A Sin-Controlled or self-centered life is evidenced by the 7 deadly sins plus other sins. A Spirit-Controlled or Christ-centered life is evidenced by the 7 Heavenly virtues, the 9 fruit of the Spirit plus other virtues. But most of us are somewhere between (where your Sin-led life is greater than your Spirit led life up to where your Spirit-led life is greater than your Sin-led life.) The Virtues are what should be growing inside of us due to the Presence of Christ; Sin should be dying, virtue should be thriving. This is our sanctification! Are you being sanctified by the Spirit of God? Are you being made holy, set apart from the rest of the world? The evidence is in your character.

Sin is sin and we must call it what it is and root it out of our lives. But if all we want to hear about is how terrible we are, it’s evidence that something is terribly wrong. You are stunted in your spiritual growth. Listen carefully to what Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:1-3 says:

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,^[a] and of faith in God, ²instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so.

Are you moving forward to further understanding?

We as Christians can be as bad as the rest of the world. But we had best be moving forward in our spiritual life – to work with the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. This is how you feed the wise wolf to do your part in winning the war for your soul. Philippians 4:8-9 says:

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Read the stories of the great people of God throughout the world. Find inspiration in Scripture and spiritual biographies. Remember the virtues of the lives of Christians you respected. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that “ As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him, and reflect His glory even more.” This is your sanctification – your holiness - your being set apart by God for

**service – your purification as the Holy Spirit changes you to be more like Jesus.
Crucify the works of the flesh. Live by the Spirit of God!**