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Sermon Notes

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## **The Poisonous Acts of the Flesh**

### **Galatians 5:19-21**

Recently, some historians have argued that lead poisoning may have contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. One expert focused his work on the way the Romans would boil honey in lead pots to make a sweetener called *defrutum* and then boiled down even further to something they called *sapa*. These sweeteners were used in many foods—meats, wines, and many other foods they ate every day. The high temperatures caused the lead and honey to mix and made a poison called lead acetate. This poison accumulated slowly in the bodies of Roman citizens, weakening them gradually, and eventually killing them. The scholar argued that this gradual poisoning contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire.

Now, this theory has been debated and many think refuted... but it got me to thinking about the passage we are looking at today... the “deeds of the flesh” and to liken all these sins as POISON masquerading as HONEY which gradually weakens and kills all who indulge in it.

Today, we are going to look carefully at a list of SPIRITUAL POISONS... the “deeds of the flesh” which the Spirit actively wars against every moment of our lives

### **I. What Kind of Life Leads to Heaven?**

#### **A. The Context: Justification by Faith, Sanctification by the Spirit**

1. The Galatian Crisis: Paul battles for the true gospel
2. The Judaizers’ false gospel: a poisonous concoction of Christ and Law
3. The centerpiece of the true gospel: justification by faith alone
4. The danger: having begun by the Spirit, the Galatians are trying to be perfected by the flesh

#### **B. The Most Common Accusation: Salvation by Grace Leads to Lawlessness**

1. Over and over again, the true gospel leads to this false conclusion

2. The bad remedy is always the same: legalism
3. Legalistic approaches have filled up Church History
4. Paul addresses the false definition of “freedom” in Galatians 5

C. Paul’s Answer: The Spirit-Filled Life

1. Not combining Christ and Moses
2. Understanding the whole salvation plan: justification—sanctification—glorification
3. Justification is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone
4. BUT Justification ALWAYS leads to sanctification
5. Sanctification occurs by the Spirit’s secret powerful work in the heart of every truly justified person

D. Key Question #1: How Can I Know I Am Justified? [ASSURANCE]

1. Answer found in this chapter
2. The Spirit’s work in the life of the true believer results in fruit that can be seen and known
3. The lifestyle... the regular patterns of life—from the heart leading to specific actions—proves the reality of the work of God
4. Galatians 5:16-26 is a powerful diagnostic tool for knowing “Am I a Christian?”
5. Negatively: is my life characterized by the domination of these “deeds of the flesh” or is it characterized by active warfare by the Spirit against them
6. Positively: is my life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit? [Next week]

E. Key Question #2: What Kind of Life Leads to Heaven?

1. That is the deeper question...
2. Justification is understandable DOCTRINALLY... but how can I know it’s actually happened?
3. Paul’s answer is to look at the heart as it leads to a pattern of life
4. The life characterized by the works of the flesh leads to hell

5. The life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit is the only one that leads to heaven

#### F. Immediate Context: The Spirit-Filled Life Means Constant Warfare

1. Obey the Command: Walk by the Spirit (vs. 16)
2. Believe the Promise: You Will Not Gratify the Lusts of the Flesh (vs. 16)
3. Expect Constant Warfare: Flesh vs. Spirit (vs. 17)
4. Understand Your New Status: Not Under Law (vs. 18)
5. Wage War God's Way: Led by the Spirit (vs. 18)
6. Today and next week: the works of the flesh vs. the fruit of the Spirit: lets you diagnose what is ACTUALLY HAPPENING in your life

## II. The Works of the Flesh (vs. 19-21)

***Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.***

#### A. The Purpose of the Sin List: Diagnosis of the Heart

1. Salvation can be seen in a therapeutic sense
2. The heart controlled by the flesh is powerfully described in this list
3. As we read this list, we see described in a powerful way what the life of the flesh looks like
4. Fifteen sins... comprehensive diagnostic tool
  - a. Not every sinner commits every sin on this list, or even commits most of them every day
  - b. BUT these are actual heart states that characterize the unregenerate heart
5. Key issue: HABIT PATTERNS... not OCCASIONAL FORAY
  - a. We'll make this point at the end!!
  - b. Every Christian occasionally displays some aspects of this list from time to time
  - c. But no Christian is continually characterized by this list

## B. The Sin List in General

1. The “Works of the Flesh”...
  - a. The “flesh” = the unredeemed nature... sin nature
  - b. The “works of the flesh” =
    - i) “desires” = “What the flesh *desires*” (vs. 17)
    - ii) What the flesh PRODUCES in the lifestyle
2. “Evident”: obvious... we have experience with these sins in daily life and can identify them; when we see them in practice, we know they are evil; this isn’t some shocking list of things we had no idea were evil! Even the pagans know these things are evil
3. Groupings
  - a. Sins of sexuality: the first three: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery
  - b. Sins of religion: idolatry, sorcery
  - c. Sins of relationships: enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy
  - d. Sins of dissipated living: drunkenness, orgies
4. The list is not exhaustive, but comprehensive: “things like these”
  - a. There are more sins than these
  - b. However, this is a very comprehensive list and it covers many aspects of human life
  - c. It is sufficient to diagnose the human heart and the spiritual condition of any person

## C. The Sin List in Detail

1. The first three “deeds of the flesh” are SEXUAL in nature
2. Sexual immorality
  - a. *Porneia*: Sexual sins of any kind
  - b. The Greco-Roman world known for sexual “openness”, tolerance of all manners of sexual appetites and practices

- c. When the gospel came to a Greek or Roman town or city, and people began to be converted, it produced massive changes in this area

***1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God***

- d. Sex is a great weakness for the entire human race... it is the major breach in the wall of human character that Satan hurls most of his assault troops at to bring the city down... how much effort does Satan put toward sexual immorality in our day and age?
  - e. From the moment that Adam and Eve ate the fruit and their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, sex has been corrupted and a major weakness
  - f. In Paul's era, sexual immorality was rampant... and Christians were specifically set apart from their pagan neighbors by their commitment to sexual holiness... the gospel changed the way people lived sexually
  - g. Many commands in the New Testament point to this issue
3. **Impurity:** literally “uncleanness”... generally seen in a sexual light; impure thoughts leading to impure actions
- a. Has to do with anything that makes someone unclean, especially in the sexual area
4. **Debauchery/Sensuality:** “total lack of self-constraint resulting in behavior that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable”... in our culture, this kind of person is called a “party animal”... someone who lives for the next thrill—maybe addicted to recreational drugs and/or alcohol; it also frequently has a sexual side to it... a person who moves from one sexual experience to the next with increasing appetite and boldness

5. OUR CONTEXT:

- a. In our day and age, we see Satan's constant assault in the world's sexual gluttony: movies, TV programs, internet pornography,
- b. Specifically on internet pornography:
  - i) \$13 billion industry in US alone
  - ii) Since the start of 2013, 2.6 BILLION searches for internet porn
  - iii) 1 in 5 mobile searches are for porn

iv) 60% of male church-going professing believers have viewed internet porn in the last year; similar stats for women

c. In general: our society is rushing headlong toward a similar sexual immorality that characterized pagan Rome: in which marriage is dishonored, homosexuality is celebrated...

i) Fornication is rampant... premarital sex is the norm; college students

Contrary to this RIVER OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY is the biblical conception of marriage... the most powerful and complex image of Christ's relationship with the Church:

Jesus' clear teaching on marriage:

Paul's assertion of the same passage:

The consummation:

Christians called on to be perfectly celibate outside of marriage, but to enjoy sexual fulfillment in covenant marriage

These standards are under OPEN ASSAULT in our culture

We must stand against all these assaults

Galatians 5 calls on all genuine Christians to be AT WAR BY THE SPIRIT against all motions of the flesh... and put them to death!!

- WAR AGAINST fornication by the Spirit... Christians need to be sexually pure before marriage; we must avoid any hint of sexual immorality; just because so many other college students are "hooking up" (as the term goes) doesn't change God's standard at all
- WAR AGAINST pornography by the Spirit... as we have mentioned; Christians need to HATE this sin as the poison it is... destroying our souls
- WAR AGAINST adultery by the Spirit... how many marriages are destroyed because the husband or wife has strayed into adultery? How much anguish? How many pastoral ministries ruined because of this sin? How many divorces spring from adultery? This too is DEADLY POISON!!
- WAR AGAINST homosexuality by the Spirit... this is the target sin for Satan's agenda in our day and age; we are being systematically trained to think differently about this sin; but God's standards haven't changed... homosexuality is as much a spiritual poison as is fornication or pornography or adultery... they are all ACTS OF THE FLESH... and the warning is clear and serious about it in 1 Corinthians 6...

- We are being told that if we oppose homosexuality on biblical grounds, we are homophobes, bigots, hate-filled, etc.
  - We must SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE... if homosexuality is spiritual poison, how could it be wrong to warn someone to stop drinking it? And the Bible is clear about this
  - Church, let's not be BULLIED into false doctrine or a false ministry... the gospel is the ONLY REMEDY for these sexual sins
  - Let's tell people the truth so they can be saved from sin and find delight in God's standards... living holy and upright lives
  - Let's courageously resist the temptation to CAVE IN on this... for the glory of God, and the eternal life of souls
  - Let's also resist the temptation to FEEL MORALLY SUPERIOR to people who struggle with sins we don't!!
- ALL the "deeds of the flesh" are poison, and the Spirit hates them ALL... because He loves us
  - We must fight these sins, each of them, for our spiritual lives depend on putting them to death

**John Owen: The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depend on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.**

"You must mortify! You must make it your daily work. You must be constantly at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work! **Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!**

***Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.***

If we sin secretly in these areas, we are constantly testing God... challenging Him to ACT AS AVENGER against His holy law!!

***Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.***

***Hebrews 12:29 our "God is a consuming fire."***

Fear the Lord!!

The next sins listed: SINS OF RELIGION

6. **Idolatry**: obviously associated with pagan religions... the worship of anything apart from the true and living God... it goes from false religions (like Hinduism or Buddhism) all the way to materialism and greed (which is idolatry)... the basic definition is in Romans 1:

***Romans 1:25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.***

Tim Keller calls idols “God-substitutes” or “rival gods”... it’s what your thoughts go effortlessly to when nothing else is demanding your attention: career advancement, a dream home, a relationship with a particular person... one or two daydreams do not constitute idolatry, but ask this: what do you habitually think about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your heart? What do you spend your money on? What gets your emotions roiling and boiling and churning? Idols tend to be at the root of all these.

A formalized system of false religion is a WORK OF THE FLESH... but so also are these HEART IDOLS

7. **Sorcery**: *pharmakeia* the use of potions and even poisons in magical practices... thus by extension, “secret arts”, witchcraft etc. [Salem, MA... the “official witch of the state of Massachusetts”... more and more interest in witchcraft in our age; also possible application here is drug use... perhaps we can extend this to the use of drugs and chemicals to SOOTHE the pain of a life away from God; but the home base here is false religion

The next eight sins on the list are SINS OF RELATIONSHIP”

8. **Hatred**: a state of hostility between people; deep seated resentments; bitterness and a deep desire for revenge, retaliation. It could go as deep as racism or the kind of hatred Jews might have for Nazis, or Serbs might have for Croats; or it could go to neighbors who just seem to hate each other
9. **Discord**: strife, quarrelling, bickering, arguing... JUST NOT GETTING ALONG

In a church, people arguing in the halls or in church conferences; in a marriage, husband and wife unable to get along, but spending their time in bickering; in the workplace, in government, in the military... just people in discord, disagreeing with one another

10. **Jealousy**: passionate commitment to self; coveting... yearning for what someone else has; secretly jealous if someone else is honored or promoted or praised or receives some kind of earthly benefit
11. **Fits of rage**: obviously someone who can’t control their temper... shouting, yelling, face getting all red, veins bulging... James calls human anger “moral filth”

**James 1:19-21** *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

12. **Selfish ambition:** pridefully yearning to rise to a position of dominance... where you can be honored, where you can be in charge, where others can bow to you

13. **Dissensions:** this just refers to STRIFE... arguments... discord... people just not getting along! Think of how many times you and your spouse have argued. Or you and your roommate. Or you and your brother/sister. Think of all the dissensions that poison church life. Think of the disagreements that make church conferences so distasteful. Think of the pride and selfishness behind all of it. Think of how this sin of dissension ruins joyful family life and church life all over the world.

14. **Factions:** This is that formation of a "party" to war against the opposite party; think about urban gangs, the Crips vs. the Bloods; the reds vs. the blues; think of how office politics can ruin a work environment; think of the factions that ruin church life...

**1 Corinthians 1:12-13** *One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided?*

**1 Corinthians 3:3-4** *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?*

15. **Envy:** How much sin comes from COVETING?! How wicked is it for us to be jealous of another person's success, another person's prosperity, another person's possessions, another person's accolades and rewards and honors... Jealousy ruins relationships; sibling rivalry ruins families; envy ruins churches

**Ecclesiastes 4:4** *I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor.*

Much sexual sin comes from looking with ENVY at some person that God has NOT GIVEN to you

Envy ruins contentment:

Contentment says...

***Psalm 16:6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.***

Envy says: I want Bathsheba, my neighbor's wife; (Ahab) I want the vineyard belonging to Naboth

These four are in direct contradiction to the unity pictured by the Trinity:

***John 17:22-23 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

The Galatians were faction-ridden...

***Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.***

Christ wants unity patterned after the Trinity

The factions of church life come directly from the FLESH!!!

The last two have to do with self-control...

#### 16. Drunkenness:

#### 17. Orgies

If you put them together, you can picture the kind of wild parties in which people lose all self-control and do wicked things

### III. The Terrifying Warning (vs. 21)

***Galatians 5:21 I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

#### A. How Can We Hear This?

1. To "inherit the Kingdom of God" is the goal of our salvation... it means to live eternally with God in heaven... people dominated by the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God

***1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived***

2. Living like this means the heart is unregenerate
3. This is the broad road that leads to destruction

4. Christians can stray into this fleshly life from time to time

***Romans 7:15-20 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my FLESH. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.***

5. But only unregenerate people live there always... totally dominated by the mind of the flesh:

***Romans 8:5-8 Those who live according to the FLESH have their minds set on what the FLESH desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup> The mind of the FLESH is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup> the mind of the FLESH is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup> Those controlled by the FLESH cannot please God.***

B. Bottom Line: Grace Does Not Produce this Kind of a Life

1. People were accusing the gospel of grace as leading to a lawless life
2. Paul says NOT AT ALL!! It is the FLESH that causes these patterns of sins
3. Rather, grace is the REMEDY to all this

***Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age***

C. How to Hear the Warnings

1. This should not THREATEN our understanding of justification or security
2. It is IMPOSSIBLE for someone genuinely regenerate and justified to lose their adoption and ultimately be cast out to hell
3. BUT... how do you know that you ARE regenerate? How do you know that you ARE adopted? The greatest evidence is PERSONAL HOLINESS
4. Willfully living in sin will DESTROY YOUR ASSURANCE... as it should
5. If a person throws off restraint and just plunges into a lifestyle of sin, they should have NO ASSURANCE OF SALVATION AT ALL

6. So, we Christians should take every warning seriously... all the elect will take those warning seriously... and we will FIGHT THE SINS from the secure position

***Philippians 2:12 “work out your salvation with FEAR AND TREMBLING”***

***Romans 8:13 “If you BY THE SPIRIT PUT TO DEATH the misdeeds of the body, YOU WILL LIVE!!!”***

The warnings are meant to make us SERIOUS TO FIGHT

A combination of TOTAL SECURITY in justification by faith in Jesus Christ and total commitment to HOLY WAR AGAINST INDWELLING SIN by the power of the Spirit is the best possible state for us

7. Gospel hypocrites, on the other hand, BLOW OFF THE WARNINGS and do not fight these deeds of the flesh by the Spirit
- a. They misunderstand the gospel
  - b. They think that some prayer they prayed years ago and their baptism will save them from hell
  - c. They think that the outward show of religiosity—attending church, being a friendly person, giving some money occasionally—that these outward acts compensate for a heart dominated by the flesh and a lifestyle of secret sins in these areas
  - d. DON'T BLOW OFF THE WARNINGS! Don't misunderstand the gospel
  - e. People who live a life characterized by the deeds of the flesh WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD!!

#### IV. Deep Humility

A. This List Should HUMBLE US DEEPLY

B. Note How Sins We Would NEVER COMMIT Are Side by Side with Sins We Commit Every Day!!

1. This is not to say that “dissension” and “adultery” are equally destructive in human relationships
2. There are lesser sins and greater sins
3. But ALL SIN is repugnant to God and is capable of damning our souls for eternity

C. Never Feel Morally Superior to Anyone About Anything

1. Especially

V. Applications

A. Come to Christ: No warfare possible as a non-Christian!

B. Understand the Spirit's role in this warfare: Only "by the Spirit" can you put to death these misdeeds

1. Rely on the Spirit actively every moment...
2. At the moment of temptation, pray to be filled with the Spirit
3. Imitate Jesus in the desert

- a. He entered the desert "led by the Spirit"

***Luke 4:1-2 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.***

- b. He left the desert "filled with the Spirit"

***Luke 4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit***

4. You express this by prayer in the midst of the temptation
  - a. "Jesus, send now your Spirit to help me fight!"
  - b. Be conscious of the Spirit's holy nature, presence, and sovereign power
  - c. Quote Scripture like Jesus did

C. Never Surrender!!! Like Winston Churchill and England against the Nazis...

1. Don't ever give up in any of these sin areas!!
2. The Spirit will never "wave the white flag" of surrender in any of these areas
3. God will not "give you over" to your sins
4. So you must never give up as well!!

D. Analyze Your Own Patterns... and Confess Your Sins

1. The issue is CHARACTERISTIC PATTERNS... what DOMINATES YOU...

2. Perfection is IMPOSSIBLE... every Christian indulges from time to time in some of the acts of the flesh
3. Frankly, if you can look at this list and not feel guilty, and not feel like it's partially describing you in your worst moments, you are DECEIVED
4. Look at the list in detail... let it EXPOSE your weaknesses
5. Everyone struggles in some way sexually... seek God's holiness and purity in the sexual area
  - a. If you are involved in some sexual sin—perhaps internet pornography, perhaps same sex attraction resulting in thoughts or actions that are sinful, perhaps a sinful relationship—repent immediately!
  - b. Perhaps you're in a dating relationship, and you've sinned together sexually... do not lower the standards to suit your lusts or the prevailing culture... read the Scripture and know that God hates fornication...
  - c. Seek God's forgiveness, and receive it by the blood of Christ
    - i) This is specifically where you must flee legalism—our forgiveness and cleansing come from faith in the shed blood of Christ alone, not by future works of obedience
    - ii) Confess your sins to God; be thorough and be passionate
    - iii) Ask God to empower you to fight sexual impurity!!
    - iv) Put on your spiritual armor
    - v) Death by starvation... start by killing the next temptation by active reliance on the Spirit... it will get progressively easier to fight
6. Look at the relational sins... ask God to reveal to you how these sins are damaging your relationships

***Galatians 5:20-21 hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy***

- a. Married people: is your marriage characterized by conflict, sinful anger, discord... repent! Turn to Christ in these specific areas... the two of you should kneel and pray together about your arguing and sinful anger
- b. Church members: is there anyone you have not forgiven? Is there any seething resentment or hatred toward another person? Perhaps they ignored you or neglected you in your time of need. Perhaps they said something unkind or hurt you in some other way. The FLESH is what

causes DISCORD and FACTIONS and HATRED... ask God to forgive you for the ways you have harbored these resentments

- c. What about PRIDE? Jealousy? Perhaps you have been envious of someone's success or money or possessions or family life. Perhaps you have talked against that person, slandered them or gossiped against them... these are also the DEEDS OF THE FLESH

E. Flee Again to the Cross of Christ!!! Know that His Blood is Sufficient to Cover Past Sins... and His Spirit and His Word Are Sufficient to Prevent Future Sins!!

1. Again, perfection is impossible... but there must be a pattern of holiness, of walking in the light

***1 John 1:5-7 God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.***

2. Cleansing is constantly needed! And available!!

3. But we have to be honest about our sins

***1 John 1:8-10 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.***