

Battleground: Flesh Vs. Spirit

Gal. 5:16-26

A faithful Christian life in its simple essence is a life lived under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit,
and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit,
and the Spirit against the flesh;
for these are in opposition to one another,
so the you may not do the things that you please.

¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:
immorality, impurity, sensuality,
²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger,
disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, drunkenness, carousing,
and things like these,
of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you,
that those who practice such things
will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control;
against such things there is no law.

²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires.

²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

²⁶Let us not become boastful,
challenging one another, envying one another.

(Gal. 5:16-26)

- **The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit – vs. 16-18**
- **The deeds of the flesh – vs. 20-21**
- **The fruit of the Spirit – vs. 22-23**
- **The life that conquers the flesh – vs. 24-26**

“Jesus Christ is the primary Person behind justification, the Holy Spirit is the primary Person behind sanctification. A

believer can no more sanctify himself than he could have saved himself in the first place. He cannot live the Christian life by his own resources any more than he could have saved himself by his own resources.” (John MacArthur)

The Law was never intended to save us, only point out our sin and then direct us to Christ. The Law was also never intended to sanctify us through religious rules, regulations, and rituals. It could never overcome the flesh; only the Spirit could.

I. The Command to walk in the Spirit.

This section begins with a command to walk in the Spirit.

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit,
and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Flesh – sarx – came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace in his life.

--Synonymous with “the natural man” or “the old nature.”

Spirit – pneuma, - the wind, air, breath, or life

“the Spirit of God who takes up residence in Christians to enable them to understand spiritual things, receive Christ as Savior and Lord, and call God ‘Father’ and develop a Christian personality.... The Spirit simply makes victory possible and that only to the degree that the believer ‘lives by the Spirit’ or ‘Walks’ in Him.”¹

To live solely by a set of laws is to live by the flesh in self-righteousness and hypocrisy and to suppress the Spirit, who alone is able inwardly to produce works of true righteousness. Holiness comes only from the Holy Spirit. Holy living does not come from our performance for God, but from His performance through us by His own Spirit.

II. The Conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

¹ James Montgomery Boice and A. Skevington Wood, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Galatians – Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 88.

¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit,
and the Spirit against the flesh;
for these are in opposition to one another,
so the you may not do the things that you please.

In the flesh I do things according to my natural inclination.

In the Spirit I walk with Christ and His life is lived out through mine.

“The flesh and the Spirit are in constant conflict against each other. These two principles are in deep and irreconcilable conflict... the flesh does no good and does not desire good, whereas the spirit does no evil and, indeed, opposes anything that does not please God.”²

¹⁷for these are in opposition to one another,
so that you may not do the things that you please.

Apparently the flesh keeps you from doing the good you desire,
and the Spirit keeps you from doing the evil you desire.

Each nature hinders the desires of the other. Since in this life we will never be freed from our sin nature we have a continual need to choose righteousness and to live in constant dependence on God’s grace.

¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

To be under the Law is to be under it’s condemnation.
The flesh is powerless to fulfill the Law; the Law is powerless to conquer the flesh.
The Spirit alone can bring a believer into victory. If He is led by the Spirit.

Next Paul examines the deeds of the flesh.

III. The Contrast of the Flesh and Spirit.

² Ibid.

¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:
immorality, impurity, sensuality,
²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger,
disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, drunkenness, carousing,
and things like these,
of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you,
that those who practice such things
will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The deeds of the flesh reflect the sinful desires of unredeemed humanness,
which are in spiritual warfare against the desires of the Spirit.

Paul writes that they are *evident*. – unmistakable, clear, obvious, plain, apparent.

Jesus said that man’s problems weren’t from without him, but from within.

When I was in school they taught that man was basically good.

I responded that I believed that man was basically evil.

They thought that I was evil for holding to that perspective.

Jesus said, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:20-23).

The Bible teaches:

Man is inherently corrupt and depraved in every aspect of his being.
The problem is that children have wicked hearts and *‘No one outgrows depravity’*.

Mark Twain said,

“We are all like the moon. We have a dark side we don’t want anybody to see.”

“Why is it that when a man with white gloves on falls in the mud,
the gloves get muddy and the mud doesn’t get *‘glovey’*?”

Throughout church history believers have been inspired by Scripture to reduce spirituality to two lists: the seven deadly sins and the seven virtues of saintliness. The former includes pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. The latter includes wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, faith, love and

hope. Even though it finds its origin in one whose life was not centered on Christ our Lord, Mahatma Gandhi's own list of "seven deadly sins" in the form of contrasts deserves our attention:

"Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience,
knowledge without character, commerce without morality,
science without humanity, worship without sacrifice,
politics without principle."³

Because of sin, man has taken
The deity out of religion,
The supernatural out of Christianity,
The authority from the Bible,
God out of education,
Morality and virtue out of literature
Beauty and truth out of art, ethics out of business,
Fidelity out of marriage.

Paul's list of the deeds of the flesh cover three general areas:

- sex
- religion
- human relationships

1. Sex

Recently Leadership Magazine commissioned a poll of a thousand pastors. The pastors indicated that 12% of them had committed adultery while in the ministry – one out of 8 pastors. – and 23% had done something they considered inappropriate. Christianity Today surveyed a thousand of its subscribers who were not pastors and found the figure to be nearly double, with 23% saying they had had extramarital intercourse and 45% indicating they had done something they themselves deemed sexually inappropriate. One in four Christian men are unfaithful, and nearly one half have behaved unbecomingly! CT readers tend to be college-educated church leaders, elders, deacons, Sunday school superintendents and teachers. If this is so for the Church's leadership, how much more for the average member of the congregation?⁴

Sexual Immorality originates from the flesh:

Immorality – porneia – (Eng. Pornography) – all illicit sexual activity.

³ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 21-22.

- Especially, but not limited to adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, and prostitution.

Impurity – akatharsia – “unclean” – used medically to refer to an oozing wound. (Neg form of katharsia – clean)

Sensuality – aselgeia – any excess or lack of restraint – sexual excess.

“It refers to uninhibited sexual indulgence without shame and without concern for what others think or how they may be affected (or infected).”

Satan is not such a fool as to fish without bait.

James wrote, “...each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings for the death” (James 1:14-15)

Oscar Wilde, the well-known British writer, summed up the attitude of millions of people when he said, “I can resist anything but temptation.”

Temptation may start small and in secret, but the Bible warns, “Be sure, your sin will find you out!” Better to confess your sins and repent of them now, rather than have to face them publically on the Day of Judgment.

2. Man-made religion

Idolatry – worship of man-made images of any sort.

Sorcery – pharmakeia – (pharmacy or pharmaceutical)

Came to mean – mood or mind-altering drugs

Occultic practices in which drugs were used to induce supposed communication with deities – related to witchcraft and black magic.

Man-made religion is based on self-righteousness, pride and self-deception.

3. Human relationships.

Relationships thrive in the fruit of the Spirit but don't survive in the flesh.

Enmities – hateful attitudes

Strife – bitter conflicts (wrong attitudes bring wrong actions).

Jealousy – a form of anger and hateful resentment caused by coveting for oneself what belongs to someone else.

Outbursts of anger – sudden, unrestrained expressions of hostility toward others – sin of an uncontrolled temper.

Attitudes or motives lead to actions

Disputes, dissensions, factions and envyings – animosities between individuals and groups. – feuds can fester for generations.

Many of these are in the plural.

Drunkenness and carousing – orgies common characteristics of pagan worship. Drunk – rowdy, boisterous, and crude behavior.

And things like these. – Paul’s list is representative and not exhaustive.

❖ The outcome of practicing the deeds of the flesh:

Paul’s warning:

those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Practice – present, ongoing participle of *prasso* -- *ongoing action*.

- Continual, habitual practice of such things marks a person as unregenerate.

Scripture always assesses a person’s character on the basis of his common, habitual actions, not his occasional ones. People who habitually indulge in sin show themselves to be enemies of God whereas those who habitually do good show themselves to be His children. The unregenerate person occasionally does humanly good things, and the regenerate person occasionally falls into sin.⁵

John writes,

⁴Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that He appeared in order to take away

⁵ MacArthur, p. 163.

sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:4-10)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

Believers no longer practice these things:

“And such were some of you;
 but you were washed,
 but you were sanctified,
 but you were justified
 in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 and in the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

❖ The Cure for the Deeds of the Flesh:

What do we do with the flesh? Verse 24 of this chapter answers this:

²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

- We must crucify the flesh.
 - We must live by the Spirit.
- Salvation is moving from living death to deathless life.

Channels Only

¹How I praise Thee, Precious Savior, that Thy love laid hold of me;
Thou has saved and cleansed and filled me that I might Thy channel be.

³Emptied that Thou shouldest fill me, a clean vessel in Thy hand;
With no power but as Thou givest Graciously with each command.

⁴Witnessing Thy power to save me, setting free from self and sin;
Thou who bought me to possess me, in Thy fullness, Lord, come in.

⁵Jesus, fill now with Thy Spirit hearts that full surrender know;
That the streams of living water from our inner man may flow.

Channels only, blessed Master, but with all Thy wondrous power.
Flowing through us, Thou canst use us every day and every hour.