

We are in the application or ethical section the letter to the Galatians. We have already had the explanation of why circumcision would take them away from faith in the sufficiency of Jesus' completed work on the cross. We can't add anything to what He did for us. It is in His righteousness that we stand before God. That righteousness of Jesus is what makes us able to be vessels of the Holy Spirit, and the first fruit of the Spirit is love.

It is interesting how Bible study in one book often lines up with the sermon passage from different book. That is because the Bible has one great theme. It is a revelation of God and of man's need for God. On Wednesday night we just went through the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. Jesus' prayer focused on two things for us: sanctification and unity. These are our greatest needs because our old nature is so self-centered. Sanctification continually crucifies the old nature so that we might serve one another (Galatians 6:2ⁱ). Only then can we be united in our mission and build one another up in love.

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:17 Flesh in this case is the unredeemed nature in the Christian which is awaiting the transformation we will experience when we see Jesus face to face (1 John 3:2ⁱⁱ). According to R. Jewett, *the flesh was Paul's term for everything aside from God in which one placed his final trust.*ⁱⁱⁱ I think of it as patterns in the mind that we developed before we came to Christ. It is also human impulses that are ungodly. The unbelievers may be disappointed in their behavior and their conscience may bother them, or they may be convicted by the Spirit of God about their sins. Addicts are often frustrated with their inability to change, but it is just as true of every type of sinful behavior.

The war within that Paul is writing about is on another level in the life of a Christian. When a person is in Christ, the Holy Spirit and the old nature are in a continual war. As young Christians we find our old nature keeps us from doing the godly things we feel the Spirit prompting us to do. Either we are selfish with our time, or we are worried that we might embarrass ourselves. But as we mature in Christ we learn to yield to the Spirit and reject thoughts and impulses that we discern are not of God. As we yield to the Spirit of God, we are increasingly enabled to reject what is of the flesh, which is the ongoing process of sanctification (Hebrews 10:14^{iv}). Even when walking in the Spirit becomes our normal way of life, we can never let our guard down (Mark 13:37^v). The enemy of our soul never gives up. Thank God the Spirit is without a doubt more powerful than our flesh (Romans 8:10^{vi}). We only need to remain in Him (John 15:5^{vii}).

Paul describes the war he experienced in Romans 7:23. *²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* He knew right from wrong in his mind, but his soul was in bondage to sin. While he describes it as his members, meaning what makes up his body, the body functions at the behest of the soul, or we could call it the heart. The soul is the mind, will, and emotions. These are the members in which sin dwells. If we are in Christ, our spirit understands the will of God and prompts us to follow what we understand from God's Word, but we can reason our way out of it because of a desire in our soul that

longs to be expressed in our body. Both natures present a promise to us. Only the new nature directed by the Spirit is telling the whole truth. The old nature is never honest about the consequences of disobedience. Paul calls them deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22^{viii}). It offers a momentary thrill or release or sense of pride in oneself.

Paul contrasts the two ways of life in Romans 8:5-7. *⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* One leads to death and the other to life and peace. One refuses to submit to the Word, the other gladly does so. Paul described his battle in Romans 7. The old nature is focused on the temporal and satisfactions that quickly fade. The new nature is focused on the eternal and things of a heavenly nature (Colossians 3:1,2^x). One lays up treasures on earth, the other in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20^x). Each is fighting to rule our souls but only we can decide to which we will live. The grace of God will help us make the right choice, if we are willing. *The battle is decided by which we are abiding in, the flesh or the Spirit. Hence, resisting the flesh isn't about willpower, but the Spirit's empowerment. In fact, it's not even about our overcoming the desires of the flesh with the Spirit's help. Rather, the Spirit wins the victory; we simply march under his banner (cf.5:25).*^{xi}

The Spirit keeps our flesh from doing what it wants when we walk in the Spirit. But if walk in the flesh, it will keep the Spirit's desires in us from coming to pass. There really is no middle ground. The most dangerous place on the battlefield is no-man's land. It is between the two sides that are at war. People who try to live in the middle make themselves a target. It is important to realize we can't choose both the flesh and the Spirit. One will dominate the other (Matthew 6:24^{xii}). New believers can waste a lot of time trying to figure out how to have both. That ends in the flesh prevailing.

We tend to pray that God would help us overcome a temptation when all we need to do is follow the Spirit's leading. God gave us the help when He filled us with His Spirit. We just yield to Him and follow His lead and watch Him be victorious. If we don't have confidence in the power of the Spirit, we end up signing a truce with sin and try to live in no-man's land. We quickly realize it is not a safe place to be. The battle only intensifies when we are there. The discipline of the Lord often comes into the equation to help us realize the need to return to walking in the Spirit (Hebrews 12:7^{xiii}).

So how do we walk in the Spirit? Romans chapter eight is Paul's answer to this internal war we experience. We already saw that in verses 5-7 that we need to set our minds on the Spirit. Paul tells us in His second letter to the Corinthians that we must take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5^{xiv}).

There is a lot of talk about screening refugees so that we don't welcome terrorists into our country. Do you screen your thoughts, because some of them come from the old nature or even from the enemy of our souls, and they are terrorists! They want you to set your mind on things of the flesh. In other words, to occupy your mind with ungodly thoughts so that you begin to walk in the flesh instead of the Spirit. If you carefully screen your thoughts, you can quickly recognize those that aren't of God and reject them before they go further. They focus on anything that will distract you from the Spirit's direction and glorifying God. Some are obviously not godly but other times they seem

harmless in themselves, and yet they are distracting you from that which is eternal. Capture those ungodly thoughts and make them obey Christ.

Paul gives another helpful point a few verses later in Romans 8. ¹¹ *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

Romans 8:11 Our body has life through the Spirit of God. Jesus said in John 14:6^{xv} that He is the Life! The Spirit of God in us. He is the life of Jesus in us! It is His power in us that enables us to put to death the deeds of the body so that we might live (8:13^{xvi}).

The psalmist also gives us instruction as to how to be victorious in this war. ¹¹ *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* Psalm 119:11 When we memorize and meditate on the Word, the Holy Spirit can bring it to our minds when we are tempted (John 14:26^{xvii}; Joshua 1:8^{xviii}). Memorizing God's Word is one of the best tools of the Spirit to keep us from stumbling into the flesh. That is why Paul tells us in the letter to the Colossians to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. ¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* Colossians 3:16

The other helpful instructions in that verse for walking in the Spirit include teaching and admonishing one another. We'll get the admonishing topic in Galatians 6, but for now consider teaching one another. We all have something to teach, and all have lot to learn. We can teach from experiences God has brought us through, in other words, testimonies. We can teach what the Lord teaches us in His Word. But we must take time in the Word and let it speak to us and apply it before we can teach others. People say they are not a teacher, but this passage tells us to teach one another in all wisdom. If you learned something from the Lord in His Word, it is "in all wisdom."

The next admonition is to sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness. Whenever I am struggling with my flesh in the car, and traffic has a way of stirring the flesh, I turn on Christian radio and sing along. Praising God from your heart of gratitude will always get you back on track. Those were a lot of points on walking in the Spirit, but it is of utmost importance. Let me summarize it briefly with the key points: **set your minds on things of the Spirit; follow the Spirit's leading; take thoughts captive; put to death the deeds of the body; memorize and meditate on the Word of God; teach one another which requires fellowship; sing songs of praise with gratitude.** Is this just a new set of laws that replace the old ones? No! This is a kind of chicken or egg first issue. Do you do these things to walk in the Spirit or are these the result of walking in the Spirit? Yes! We cooperate with and submit to the Spirit who does the work in and through us.

¹⁸ *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* Galatians 5:18 John Stott argues that this is a summation statement of verses 13-18 and should therefore be translated "Since you are led by the Spirit..." That goes along with the confidence he stated earlier in the letter regarding their salvation. He is summing it all up and telling them they don't need to listen to the false teachers' demands that they be circumcised because they are led by the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and therefore fulfill the Spirit behind the law.

Romans 8:1,2^{xix} instructs us that in Christ there is no condemnation, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death. The Spirit leads us to act according to God's will. He is the same Spirit who wrote the law. The law was given by the Spirit for those without the infilling of the Spirit. Now that the Spirit has been poured out, we don't need the baby steps of the do's and don'ts of the law, for the Spirit deals with each and every situation in accordance with God's will. The sons of God are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14^{xx}) who enables them to crucify the flesh, and thus they fulfill the intentions of the law. The law couldn't change the heart. The Spirit makes us new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xxi})! That does not mean we never yield to the flesh, but rather that our lives are predominantly those led by the Spirit, who also immediately checks us when we are tempted by the flesh.

It is truly a war against two opposing forces (2 Timothy 2:3,4^{xxii}). During the Vietnam War protest era there was a song called War! And the chorus went like this: "War, what is it good for, absolutely nothing!" Well, this war we experience when we come to Christ is a war worth fighting. But we must understand that we can't fight it like we fight other battles. Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 *⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*

We have talked about some of the Bible's pointers for walking in the Spirit. This verse brings up the fact that we can't fight the way we fight physical wars because our battle is spiritual. We have divine power to destroy strongholds. Those are issues in our hearts or our culture that are ungodly, and the world argues that they are just fine. In our personal lives it can be addictions even to simple things like food and entertainment, things which are not ungodly unless we are trying to fill the void in our hearts with an excess of them. Then there are the clearly ungodly things that we can try to justify in our minds such as alcoholism, pornography, cheating on our taxes, greed, selfishness with our time, etc. But what Paul told us in Galatians 5:16^{xxiii} is that the Spirit is absolutely more powerful than the flesh when we choose to walk in the Spirit. The key to victory is to yield to our Lord's mighty power. The arguments and lofty opinions are destroyed by the truth of the Word of God. We need to be in the Word to recognize truth.

These two verses have so much to say to us. They declare the state of the believer in our current struggle, but also the freedom of not being under the law or condemnation. Realizing we are in a war is where we begin after we are saved. Then we learn how to battle spiritually. Most of our battle is within. I often say it is between our ears, but it is also in our heart. We would do well to take regular inventory of how our personal battle is going. The longer we are in Christ the easier it is to think we have come this far and that is enough. **Complacency can be one of the greatest dangers to a long-time believer (Revelation 3:17^{xxiv}).** There is always room for growth, to be more like Jesus. If we are not actively resisting evil and eagerly seeking to do good, we have settled down in the world and quit walking in the Spirit. We should pray the psalmist prayer each night: *²³Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* Psalm 139:23,24

For the young believers, especially in our world today, the fruit of the Spirit, self-discipline, needs to be carefully exercised. Our world is full of entertainment that takes us

away from filling our minds with the Word of God and taking time to fellowship with one another. We have a world full of faces fixed on screens. But even those can be used for God's glory and your growth. Use a Bible app. Download Christian songs that move your heart. Build playlists for when you are in a battle, or worship and praise. What the enemy meant for evil God can use for good! Walk in the Spirit and you will be led to what you need to become established in the faith.

Why would we join this war? Those who decide not to are captives and don't realize it (2 Timothy 2:26^{xxv}). Why not, as in the Matrix movie, take the green pill and just forget about it and enjoy what you can? Because it is a lie! This world promises everything but only delivers in little spurts of temporal pleasure and whole lot of consequences that are always worse than you imagined and cost you more than you wanted to pay. And when it is over you will face justice. Freedom, peace, and joy in Christ now and forever is infinitely better. You are loved. Jesus died to set us free!

Bishop Walsham How describes the four states of man in this war. In the first state there was no struggle, because the evil held undisputed sway. In the second state there was a struggle, but it was the helplessness of the natural man striving in vain to fulfil the law of God. In the third state there is a struggle too, but now it is the grace and power of God striving in us against the rebellious nature which before held us captive, and that grace and power gain the victory. In the fourth state there is again no struggle. But it is because the battle has been fought, and the victory gained forever. No more foes to oppose, no sins to do battle with. A state we may not look for in this life; but it shall be reached by all who persevere. A little while, and the last struggle will be over; and then—rest, peace, joy, glory, victory!^{xxvi}

And for those of you who chose to enter this war and fight with everything within our power and the power of His might, know that it is not forever. The Lamb has secured the victory! In Romans 8:23 Paul tells us that while we groan inwardly now, we hope for what we know is coming, the redemption of these bodies (Romans 8:23^{xxvii}). Our glorious hope is to see our Lord and be transformed (Philippians 3:21^{xxviii}). The war will be over, our body, soul, and spirit will be blameless (1 Thessalonians 5:23^{xxix}). We will be the bride of Christ, radiant and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27^{xxx}). Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what awaits those of us who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9^{xxxi}).

Questions

- 1 What does the flesh mean in this passage?
- 2 What is this war about?
- 3 How did Paul describe his war in Romans 7?
- 4 How is the battle decided?
- 5 Why can't we have both the world and the Spirit?
- 6 List Paul's suggestions for walking in the Spirit?
- 7 What are "strongholds"?
- 8 What is key to fighting our battles?
- 9 What is the suggested prayer to summarize your day?
- 10 Why would we join this war?
- 11 What are the four stages of the war?

ⁱ **Galatians 6:2 (ESV)**

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

ⁱⁱ **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

ⁱⁱⁱ George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 387). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} **Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

^v **Mark 13:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

^{vi} **Romans 8:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

^{vii} **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

^{viii} **Ephesians 4:22 (ESV)**

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

^{ix} **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

^x **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

^{xi} Todd Wilson, Preaching the Word - Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living.

^{xii} **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xiii} **Hebrews 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

^{xiv} **2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)**

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

^{xv} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xvi} **Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

^{xvii} **John 14:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

^{xviii} **Joshua 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

^{xix} **Romans 8:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

^{xx} **Romans 8:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

^{xxi} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xxii} **2 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

^{xxiii} **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

^{xxiv} **Revelation 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

^{xxv} **2 Timothy 2:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

^{xxvi} Exell, J. S. (n.d.). *The Biblical Illustrator: Galatians* (p. 369). New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company.

^{xxvii} **Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

^{xxviii} **Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

^{xxix} **1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)**

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xxx} **Ephesians 5:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xxxi} **1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—