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"The Battle of the Flesh and Spirit"

Galatians 5

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When a person becomes a Christian, a battle begins between the flesh and the spirit. The flesh is that part of our lives that desires sinful things; the spirit is that part of our lives that wants to glorify God. Our flesh always wants to dominate, but the Bible tells us to die to self and live in the Spirit. Paul wrote about this spiritual battle in Galatians 5, and in this study, we will discuss the three practical ways that he gives us to win the war within.

1. **Galatians 5:16–26** – *"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."*
2. The flesh and the spirit
 - a. We need to fight our sin nature every time it crops up.
 - i. **Romans 7:18–25a** – *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*
 1. The Bible uses battle language, such as "warring against," to describe our struggle against the flesh (our sin nature).

- b. When we become Christ-followers, there is conflict between the flesh and the spirit.
 - i. When self is king, there is no conflict, because there is no struggle to live in the Spirit.
 - ii. When you become a Christ-follower, Christ is king, but there is conflict with the fleshly instincts.
 - 1. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to pray.
 - 2. In the Spirit, the apostles wanted to pray, but in the flesh, they fell asleep on the day that Jesus was arrested.
 - 3. **Matthew 26:41b** – *“The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (NIV)
 - 4. **DISCUSS:** What does the Spirit seek to do in your life? How do the desires of the flesh get in the way?
- c. We will all return to dust.
 - i. People are composed of oxygen, hydrogen, and 15 other trace elements found in dirt.
 - ii. As Believers, our spirits are regenerated, but our bodies are not.
 - 1. Our unregenerated bodies have instinctive fleshly desires.
 - 2. Believers will get a glorified body one day. Until then, we war against the flesh.
 - iii. When we die, we will all live forever in one of two places.
 - 1. Believers in Christ will live forever in heaven with God.
 - 2. Unbelievers will live forever in hell apart from Christ whom they rejected.
 - 3. Hell was originally *“prepared for the devil and his angels”* (**Matthew 25:41b**).
 - 4. God does not want anyone to perish (**2 Peter 3:9**), so He sent His Son to die to save everyone who puts their trust in Jesus’ finished work on the cross.
 - 5. God gave us free will, so we all have a choice in how we respond to Jesus.
 - 6. Those who reject Christ reject Him to their own peril.
- d. We must allow the Spirit to dominate rather than the flesh.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 9:27** – *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** Do you keep your testimony in mind before you speak or act?

3. Defining spiritual warfare

- a. **Romans 7:24** asks, *“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

- i. Virgil wrote about a Roman form of punishment for murderers.
 - 1. Sometimes, Romans punished murderers by chaining the deceased victims to the backs of their killers.
 - 2. The disease and bacteria of the decaying corpse would eventually kill the murderer.
- b. **Romans 7:25** gives the answer.
 - i. **Romans 7:25a** – *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (ESV)

4. Characteristics of the flesh and the Spirit

- a. The one in charge
 - i. Paul lists the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.
 - ii. We must be dominated by the Spirit rather than the flesh.
 - 1. After the list of the works of the flesh, Paul says that *“those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (**Galatians 5:21**).
 - 2. If your life is marked more by the works of the flesh than the fruit of the Spirit, you are either backslidden or unsaved.
 - 3. **DISCUSS**: Which of Paul’s lists most characterizes your life? What are some things you need to cast off? What are some things you need to put on?
- b. Two lists
 - i. Paul listed over 15 works of the flesh.
 - 1. **Galatians 5:19** – *“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures . . .”* (NLT)
 - a. *“Fornication”* comes from the Greek **porneia**, which refers to any form of sexual immorality.
 - 2. **Galatians 5:20–21** – *“. . . idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”* (NLT)
 - a. *“Idolatry”* is loving anyone or anything more than God.
 - b. *“Sorcery”* is **pharmakeia** in the Greek, which is where we get the word “pharmacy.” Drugs were often used in cult worship.
 - c. *“Division”* comes from the idea of forming factions and cliques.
 - d. *“Wild parties”* is sometimes translated as *“orgies.”*

- e. This is not an exhaustive list of sins, hence the phrase *“and other sins like these.”*
 - ii. Paul listed nine fruits of the Spirit.
 - 1. **Galatians 5:22–23** – *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”*
 - a. *“Longsuffering”* means *“patient.”*
- 5. How to win the battle
 - a. Walk in the Spirit
 - i. **Galatians 5:16** – *“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”*
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? How are you living that out?
 - ii. When talking about resisting temptation in **Romans 8**, Paul mentioned the Holy Spirit 21 times.
 - 1. **Romans 8:10–11** – *“And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*
 - 2. *“But”* can be translated as *“and”* or *“since”* because it is a definitive statement in the Greek.
 - iii. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us.
 - 1. This truth is encouraging, because we can say no to any temptation.
 - a. **DISCUSS:** How do you encourage yourself in the Lord when you are tempted to sin?
 - 2. This truth is challenging, because we have no excuse to give into temptation.
 - a. When Christians fall into sin, that is not from a lack of Holy Spirit power, but from a lack of will power.
 - b. We must cooperate with the power of God in us.
 - c. God always gives us a way to escape temptation.
 - d. **1 Corinthians 10:13** – *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*
 - b. Crucify the flesh.

- i. **Galatians 5:24** – *“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*
 1. We are called not just to kill the flesh, but to crucify it, and thus identify with the finished work of Jesus Christ.
 2. **Matthew 16:24** – *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”*
 3. **DISCUSS:** Do you die daily (**1 Corinthians 15:31**)? Is there anything you need to crucify?
- ii. **Romans 8:12–13** – *“Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.” (NLT)*
 1. Starve yourself from what feeds your sinful nature.
 2. Guard the gateways to your heart.
 3. **DISCUSS:** Our eyes, ears, and feet can all be gateways to the heart. What are some ways you take inventory of what you allow into your heart?
 4. Feed the Spirit with God’s Word, worship music, and more.
 5. **DISCUSS:** To guard your heart, what are some things that you must starve? How will you feed the Spirit instead?
- c. Live with humility.
 - i. **Galatians 5:26** – *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*
 1. To not provoke or envy means not playing the comparison game.
 2. To compare yourself to others means you will either act superior (i.e., “provoke”) or feel inferior to others (i.e., “envy”). Focus on Jesus and walk with Him.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)