

Winning the War Within

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Galatians 5:16–25 (NKJV) “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, 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. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Every Christian alive on this earth is engaged in a war. The church is the army of God. Believers are soldiers in the war. The war is between good and evil, right and wrong, and the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Faithful believers in Christ will inevitably face the external onslaught of Satan to resist and defeat them in life. While believers are sometimes aware of the external war with this world, they are often unprepared for the war within. That’s right, not only must believers be valiant for the cause of Christ fulfilling His Great Commission to reach the world, they must be even more valiant in the war over their own soul.

There is a war within the soul of every believer between the flesh and the Spirit. People often and wrongfully blame their sin on the devil. Years ago in a comedy routine, Flip Wilson played the part of a woman named Geraldine who continually acted out in a wrong way and then said, “The devil made me do it!” The reality is, the war within is not a conflict between the believer and the devil. It is a battle for control between the flesh and the Spirit of God. Believers deceive themselves when they blame the devil for their own fleshly episodes. Believers also deceive themselves when they blame God for the misery of the consequences caused by their own fleshly actions and reactions.

Paul exhorts believers to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit’s control: “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Believers will never gain victory over the flesh as long as they remain neutral in the battle. They will never gain victory over the flesh as long as they make provision for the flesh rather than crucify the flesh. Unfortunately many Christians talk about how weak they are in the flesh. But that is an excuse when we have the power of the Holy Spirit available to us to overcome the flesh. The determining factor in our victory is not the flesh or the Spirit but our submission and obedience to the will of God. Grace is not given where obedience is not offered. Obey God, crucify the flesh, and then receive from God the grace you need to walk in victory by the Spirit of God.

The flesh is the enemy of God’s sanctifying work in our life. The desires of the flesh are opposed to the desire of the Spirit. In addition, the Spirit’s desire is opposed to the desire of the flesh. James 4:5 (NKJV) says, “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’?” The flesh and the Spirit are contrary (opposed) to one another so that we do not do the things that we know God expects of us. The believer’s re-born human spirit has the inborn desire to obey the Lord but the flesh still wants to have its own way.

When the New Testament speaks of “the flesh” in this context, it is not speaking of our physical body. Rather it is speaking of the remnant of our old sin nature residing in our soulish being, the soul being the seat of “self.” The flesh is controlled by self—selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-exaltation. Because of its obsession with self, the flesh is hostile toward God in order to get its own way and its own desires: “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:16-17 NKJV)

Because the flesh is obsessed with self, it is the direct opposite of love. Love puts God and others first. The flesh puts itself first. Love serves God and others. The flesh is self-serving. Love seeks what is best for the relationship. The flesh seeks what is best for itself. Love forgives and lets go. The flesh holds a grudge for selfish revenge. Those in the flesh seek their own way rather than God's way.

The flesh has its own mindset. Those in the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. (Romans 8:5) The flesh is strengthened by strongholds of the mind—mindsets that have not yet been transformed to embrace the will of God. (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:16) Paul said that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:8) When the flesh is in control, its works will be directly opposite from the fruit of the Spirit's control (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Those who walk according to the flesh and manifest the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Those who walk in the Spirit manifest the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) The "fruit of the Spirit" is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in our life. When we yield our lives in submission to God, the Holy Spirit produces the character of Christ ("fruit of the Spirit") within us. The fruit of the Spirit manifests itself in our goods works and is a seal of authentication that testifies that our works have been truly done in Him. (John 3:21; Ephesians 2:10) Those who walk in the Spirit are not under the law. They are free from slavery to sin and the flesh. They experience the joy of being truly set free by the Son of God.

How do we win the war within? First, we must make a quality decision to walk in the Spirit. Until you make a quality decision to crucify the selfish desires of flesh and cease making provision to fulfill them, you will lose the war within. Walking means to moving in the right direction. Until you start taking steps in obedience to God, you are not walking in the Spirit. Second, live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25) Make sure you are drawing your very life from the Spirit of God each day. Acknowledge the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within you. (Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 7:24-8:2) You cannot win the war within through will power alone. You need the Spirit's power working on the inside of you. Third, crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. Jesus told us to take up our cross. This means living the crucified life. The crucified life involves crucifying or saying NO to any provision for the flesh to have its way. Fourth, renew your mind to the will of God. (Romans 12:2) Don't let the old patterns of reasoning and excuse making control your mind. Get the Word of God inside you until your mind is completely washed and renewed. Fifth, use the spiritual weapons that Christ has given you in salvation to take captive every thought that is in rebellion to the knowledge and will of God. (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthian 10:3-5) The Word of God will expose and uproot fleshly mentalities that allow sin to rule in our heart and mind. Sixth, be led by the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit does not refer to following some kind of mystical guidance from God. Rather, being led by the Spirit means setting your mind on the things of the Spirit rather than on the things of the flesh. Being led by the Spirit means yielding your will to the will of God, Even Jesus said, "Your will not mine be done."

Walking involves taking one step at a time in the same direction. Walking in the Spirit involves taking every step in obedience to the Spirit. We are not walking in the Spirit when we take one step with the Spirit and two steps in the flesh. Are you tired of living a life controlled by the flesh? Then die to self and come alive to the Spirit. Cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Trade hate for love. Trade bitterness for joy. Trade insecurity for peace. Trade impatience for patience. Trade callousness for kindness. Trade evil for goodness. Trade instability for faithfulness. Trade harshness for gentleness. Trade impulsiveness for self-control. In the end, trade selfishness for service.

You can have victory over sin. You can live a life controlled by the Spirit rather than by the flesh. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Walk in the Spirit, and you will win the war within.

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