

Winning the Inner Conflict

Galatians 5:16-18

¹⁶I 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.

We are all creatures that have dual natures. None of us are immune to it. If we learn this early in life and are given tools with which we can press down the carnal side, life will be better for us. However if we are given tools that suggest that we can do anything we want....well, life might be so good!! Paul speaks of this in Romans 7:15-19...***¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.***

This is the inner conflict that I want to discuss with you this morning. Some of us have a very strong desire to be thin – but the conflict comes when we want to eat Pizza and Ice Cream.. This inner conflict goes far beyond what we want to eat. This conflict also affects our spiritual man. Too often we find ourselves wanting to separate things that are diametrically opposed – like wanting to do right being overshadowed by the desire to do something we know to be wrong.

Paul argues here in Gal. 5 that we must walk by the Spirit. He tells us that if we do this, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Walking in the Spirit suggests that this is a step by step process that is ongoing throughout our life.

I was once at Wal-Mart in the magazine area. In the fitness section there were magazines on weightlifting; yoga; aerobics; and believe it or not – WALKING!! Now I could see the need for instruction in all those other activities – but walking?? The magazine comes out 6 times a year – what could they possibly be saying?? I’ve been walking since I was 10 months old according to what my mother told me. I guess I mastered it by age 2 and I’ve been doing for the past 67 years without incident – for the most part. What else is there to know??

Apparently, there’s more to walking than one might think. For example, if you’re walking for health reasons you must know how to stretch and warm up; how to pick the right shoes; how to pace yourself; what kind of foods to eat. More to walking than one would think!

In the same way, there is a lot to be said about walking in the Spirit. There are things you can do to improve the way you walk in the Christian life. Walking in the Spirit is a process and once you master the technique, you’ll experience the victory Paul talks about in this chapter in verse 16 *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

I want to look at three things that we can do to improve our walk and as a result, experience victory in this inner conflict. First,

1. Filter Your Influences

Listen to Paul in Gal. 5:7-9 *⁷You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

Paul is saying, “you’re listening to the wrong people. You’re allowing yourself to be influenced by them”.

What had happened in Galatia was that a group of Jewish Christians who believed that you had to keep Jewish laws in order to be saved, had come into the church in Galatia and begun spreading their influence. Many of the Galatian Christians were being led astray – including the Apostle Peter!!

At the center of the controversy was the ritual of circumcision because it was symbolic to the Jewish law. So, this group of legalists were saying, “It’s good that you want to follow Jesus, now in order to be a TRUE follower, you must be circumcised.” Implied in that is the idea of following all Jewish laws such as dietary laws; Sabbath laws; etc. All the law CENTERED around circumcision. Paul was furious with them because they were causing dissension and confusion. They were trying to turn people away from salvation by grace and taking them back to a LAW.

Paul next says something rather shocking in verse 12. *I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!* The words for “*cut themselves off*” or mutilate in some translations means literally to “**castrate**”. This shows how serious this is especially to Paul. This is not just some minor doctrinal difference, it’s about the foundation of spiritual life. They were trying to persuade these Christians to earn their salvation through obedience to a DEAD LAW!!

Paul says, “Don’t listen to them – listen to me. Look at 5:10 (NLT) *“I am trusting the Lord to bring you back to believing as I do about these things. God will judge that person, whoever it is, who has been troubling and confusing you.”*

Each of us has one person in our life that is the voice of “law”. That is the voice of non-grace. They tell us “you have got to prove yourself over and over again; you’ve got to earn any respect or kindness you get from me; you’ve got to measure up to MY standard.” It might be the voice of a parent; a boss; a spouse; or one of our “friends” – too often we project that voice onto GOD. We hear God say to us, prove it; earn it; work for it; and by the way – I’m still not satisfied with you”.

This is the voice of the legalist – it is NOT the voice of God. It is the voice of self-righteousness not the voice of mercy. If we are to learn to walk by the Spirit, then we must turn on the filters against such persons and **TUNE THEM OUT!!!**

Listen to the voices of grace in your life; to those who speak strength into your life; encouragement into your life; comfort into your life. Listen to those who inspire you to become like Jesus; ignite a passion for holiness and who remind you of the goodness of God's grace. Listen to them because they will help you learn to walk in the Spirit.

2. Look For Opportunities To Serve Others.

Paul said, ***“¹³For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

Ever notice how often in the Bible true spirituality is connected to how we treat others?? One reason the legalist prefers that way of thinking is that it allows them to remain self-centered rather than thinking of others. It is much easier to follow a few rituals – washing your hands; eat certain foods – than it is to devote your life to serving others. Legalist focus on “me – me – me – how well do I measure up to the law?” Conversely the person who lives by grace is “you” oriented as in what can I do for you??

To win the inner conflict within us we need to busy ourselves looking for ways to serve others. Serving others will never incur the wrath of God in our life because God loves it when we serve others. It's kind of what His Son did for mankind isn't it??

3. Think On Your Feet

I mentioned earlier that I had been walking for over 6 decades and I've become quite proficient at it. There have been a few times in walking that things have not been exactly right.

Our son Brian and I went to a Reds game back in the late 80's. We were walking through the crowded stadium and I was talking to him about something important (to me at least). When I had come to the end of my speech, I looked at him to see to it that he was on the same page and he was not there!!

Brian had stopped at the rest room about 100 yards back and I had been walking along talking out loud to no one. To make things worse I had been waving my arms around to make my points. I must have appeared crazy to some folks. I wondered why no one had bumped me or gotten in my way.

Was the problem the way I was walking?? No – I wasn't focused on walking. I was just going thorough the motions of walking and I ended up doing something foolish. In our Christian lives **if** we merely go through the motions of a spiritual walk (going to church; memory verse; taking communion) we are likely to make the same kind of mistake and find ourselves in a mess.

Walking by the Spirit is not done by accident. It is something that we learn to do, and it is a deliberate choice that we make. It happens with conscious effort on our part. In other words – you must think as you walk!! You must stay focused as you walk!! You must pay attention as you walk. We must learn to think on our feet because thinking has a lot to do with walking in the Spirit.

In Rom. 8:5 Paul said, *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, the things of the Spirit.*

Walking in the Spirit BEGINS with thinking in the Spirit. Paul gives us a couple of things to think about. First, he reminds us of what the negative consequences are of living a life according to the desires of the flesh. Look at Gal. 5:19-21 *¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ 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.”*

There are consequences to behavior. Paul mentions hostility; quarreling; jealousy; selfish ambition; divisions; envy.

All these things lead to misery – not mastery. Think about the outcome of negative behavior in life. Do you want to win this inner conflict? Then do these three things:

1. Filter your influences;
2. Look for opportunities to serve others;
3. Think on your feet.

This battle against the two natures at war within us is a battle that will not end this side of heaven. We will constantly have these struggles. But thanks to God through the Apostle Paul we have a remedy that we can apply – learn to walk in the Spirit!!