



World Christian Fellowship

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Galatians

Lesson 49 - Who wins the conflict? Flesh? Or Spirit?

Galatians 5:16-22, *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 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. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness*

The essence of perfect sanctification is perfect love and perfect obedience. Perfect love toward God and perfect conformity to God's will and Word.

Do you want to fulfill the law of God?

Walk in the Spirit.

Verses 17 and 18, the conflict.

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit.”



We are recognizing that in spite of having the Holy Spirit in us there is going to be conflict.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

These two verses declare to us the way view ourselves because this is at the heart.

We go to a doctor because we want a diagnosis of our condition.

This is a diagnosis of our spiritual condition.

This is how it is set up in us to have this kind of conflict. We are all in the same situation.

The flesh is still there, and the Spirit is there, and the presence of conflict.

“The flesh”

That is our unredeemed human fallenness. Our sin nature is still present.

The Flesh desire is against the Spirit, and the Spirit’s desire is against the flesh.

So, these are in opposition to one another.

Final statement – *“so that you may not do the things that you please.”*

Now, “the things that you please” are manifestations of your flesh.

This is what you wanted before you become a Christian. It’s just the natural inborn longings of a fallen human heart for self-fulfillment, the things that lust and pride develop in the heart and reach out to fulfill. Those desires are what you please.

But that verse is saying, “The Holy Spirit is given to you to oppose that so you may not do those things.”

That should be good news to you. The Holy Spirit is in every believer as the Restrainer.

The Holy Spirit's role is to

- empower you in the direction of righteousness, and
- restrain you from just doing the things that you please.

In the past that is how we lived our life. You did whatever you pleased, and you were going down a path of damnation. Because the things that pleased us were sinful things, because they had no recognition of the glory and honour of God. So, the Holy Spirit is given to you to restrain those natural desires.

This is a divine diagnosis of our problem.

- God understands the conflict in our life.
- God understands that there is fallen flesh, and it has its desires for what it pleases.
- God has given us His Holy Spirit to restrain that, so that our lives are changed.

It doesn't mean that we never sin. What it does mean is that we don't always sin. As you grow spiritually and become more and more like Christ, sin decreases and righteousness increases.

The Spirit of God trains us with the Word of God, so that we sin less and obey more, this is what called our spiritual growth.

That is the basic diagnosis of the heart and soul of a Christian.

There is a war going on there between our fallen sinful flesh that wants what it wants, and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit stopping us from going in that direction.

V 18, *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

Here's his point:

Having been led by the Spirit,

- you will not come to increasing Christlikeness,
- you will not come to holiness,
- you will not come to sanctification by the law.

Don't go back and let anybody make rules on your life that tell you that you are going to be holy if you keep these external behaviours. That is not going to do it. You don't want to be under the law.

When Paul says you are not under the law, he is saying that you are not in a good ground.

Galatians 3:10, *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

You are under the dominion of sin.

Galatians 3:22, *But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

You were under custody.

Galatians 3:23, *But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.*

You were under a tutor.

Galatians 3:25, *But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*

You were under a guardian.

Galatians 4:2, *but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.*

You were on bondage.

Galatians 4:3, *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.*

You were under slavery.

Galatians 4:5, *to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

Finally questions them in

Galatians 4:21, *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?*

The law plays no role in saving you or sanctifying you.

When Apostle Paul is talking about the law, he is obviously not talking about God's moral law, which is merely a radiance of His nature. Paul is talking about external behaviors and ceremonies.

In the Christian life there is a battle going on in all of us between our unredeemed flesh and the indwelling Holy Spirit living and moving through our new nature.

So, we live in this conflict!

The Lord understands it. He saved us, He loves us, He gave us His Holy Spirit, but He understands this is a very real battle.

What is the solution to winning the conflict?

It is a steady step, by step walk.

Illustration.

John 11:

We have nearly 5 hours of message on this chapter alone.

When our Lord Jesus arrives to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. When the Lord arrived at Lazarus grave his sisters were very disappointed because they wanted the Lord to come when he was just ill, because they knew the Lord could heal him when he was ill.

They weren't so sure that He could heal him when he was dead, and especially after four days. Jesus purposely delayed coming because He wanted him good and dead, because He wanted to put His power on display. He knew He could heal a dead man from death as easily as He could heal a living man from any disease. But He wanted to put His full power on display.

So, He went to Lazarus' grave and He said, "Take the stone away." Martha, skeptical at that moment, knows that a stench is going to come out, because that would have been the case in four days. Jews did not embalm the body so it would have been gone through some serious decay.

Martha replies to Jesus.

John 11:39, *Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."*

Jesus ignored her concern and cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

John 5:25, *Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.*

What did they see when Lazarus came out of the grave?

John 11:44, *And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."*

They must have seen a mummy hopping.

As long as the stinking grave clothes filled with decay and the stench of death clung to him, he did stink, and he was hindered in expressing his new life.

Now Lazarus offers a graphic illustration of our predicament as regenerate Christians.

We have been raised to walk in newness of life. We are still wrapped in the remnants of our fallenness. Even though we are alive from the dead, the grave clothes are still stuck to us. Bound in our own grave clothes, raised, new life, but with a stench.

This is the reality of your spiritual condition.

However, there is a deeper and more profound issue for us than there was with Lazarus.

Lazarus' rags came off, they unwrapped him; ours don't. Lazarus was just material covered. Once it was removed and disposed of, the stench was gone. The corruption of death no longer clung to him.

Our predicament cannot be so quickly altered.

Why?

Because it's not a material cloth that clings to us.

Romans 7:24, *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Apostle Paul says that we have connected to us the body of this death.

In ancient times, to punish a murderer they would sometimes strap the corpse of the one he killed to his body until its decay eventually ate into the killer and took his life. Paul says we have a body of death attached to us.

Romans 8:23, *Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

We are not yet what we are going to be!
It doesn't yet appear what we shall be!
But we will be like Him when we see Him as He is.

So here we are, and we have a new life, a new nature, new longings, new loves, new desires. We have the Holy Spirit empowering us and restraining the flesh that is in us, but the flesh is still clinging to us. Sin is present, but it is no longer dominant. It is present, but it is no longer dominant.

Romans 6 Paul shows us that sin is present, but not dominant.

Romans 6:5, *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,*

We have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death. We have also been united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection.

So, we have had a resurrection. We are all Lazarus in that sense, we have all been raised from the dead.

Romans 6:6, *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

We are no longer slaves to sin. Sin is no longer master. Sin no longer rules and dominates over us.

Romans 6:7-11, *For he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Stay with the same thought

Romans 6:12, *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.*

It assumes that sin is still there.

Romans 6:13-14, *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

So you are being asked present your members of the body from slaves to sin to slaves to God.

Romans 6:15-19, *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

The issue is that,

- we have died with Christ,
- we have risen with Christ.

We are like Lazarus, but have a dead body still tied to us, and we can't shake it in this life. We don't get rid of it until the redemption of our body when we leave this world and enter the Lord's presence.

Is Paul saying we are sinless?

Is Paul saying we are without sin?

Not at all.

What Paul is saying is that we have this body of death strapped to us, and we must, we must exercise obedience to the Word of God in us, yielding our members as instruments of righteousness.

There are, however, people who think that the Bible teaches we can become sinless. That might surprise you, but it's a longstanding, very popular, very widespread theology.

This is a direct quote from a statement in the **Church of the Nazarene** articles of faith. Say it again: *"We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God subsequent to regeneration by which believers are made free from original sin and depravity, brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and holy*

obedience and love made perfect. And you can get to that point in this life.”

Let us not spend much time on this theology. (If you really want to know more comprehensive theology on this please read the book on Holiness by J.C. Ryle and B.B. Warfield written about it in Perfectionism.)

The Lord knows you have a conflict!

Not only God knows that but also, He understands that.

One theologian puts it across so beautifully, **“Saving faith lives in a broken heart. It always grows in a heart humbled by sin in a weeping eye and a tearful conscience.”**

That is the mark of a truly godly person, not the idea that he’s sinless and reached perfection. In this life the conflict will rage.

Hebrews 12:1, *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

Proverbs 20:9, *Who can say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin”?*

1 John 1:8-10, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from*

all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

James 3:2, *For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*

Back to our text, **Galatians 5:17**,

Spirit and Flesh are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things you desire, you wish, or things that please you.

Paul the apostle is going to describe his own understanding of himself. This is how Paul sees himself as a believer.

Romans 7:14-16, *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For 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. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.*

Romans 7:12, *Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*

But there's something going on in me.

Romans 7:17, *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

There's the pathology of the Christian. "I love God." The "I" has been changed. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live." "But it's a new 'I.' But this new 'I' has to deal with sin which dwells in me."

Romans 7:18-20, *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. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

Paul distances himself – his new eye, his new person in Christ – from the sin that is still in him.

Romans 7:21 –24, *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ 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. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

There is the testimony of a godly man. He is not going to say, "Holy man that I am. Sin has been eradicated; I'm living in Christian perfection."

Just the absolute opposite.

Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Who will detach me from the corpse?

Romans 7:25, *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Yes, one day that will come to that perfection.

Romans 8:23, *Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

But until then?

Romans 7:25, *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

On the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God,

On the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Does it comfort you to know that God understands the struggle?

Does it comfort you to know that God doesn't expect perfection?

But God has provided the Holy Spirit to move you in the right direction!

Now why is sanctification important?

1. Worship.

Psalm 15:1-5, *Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? ²He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; ³He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; ⁴In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.*

In other words, God is saying that don't come into My presence unless you come with clean hands and a pure heart.

It is important.

Someone could say that I don't worry about sanctification, I am going to heaven anyway.

Sanctification is critical, first of all, because you love the Lord but for worship.

2. Witness.

Matthew 5:14-16, *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

2 Timothy 2:20-22, *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

3. Prayer

It is essential for prayer.

Psalms 66:18, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”*

1 Peter 2:1-3, *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

Unless you are in the path of sanctification, walking by the Spirit, becoming more like Christ you can't worship, witness and pray to God.

Sin is not killed when it is only covered up, when it is exchanged for a different sin. Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.