

# “The War Within”

(Galatians 5:16-18 ~ Part 1)

## Introduction

➤ We are living in the midst of a serious and hostile battle. But it is not the battle that many people think. Today, when someone speaks of conflict or war, our minds often think of the battles within politics (national/global), culture/society, or even marriage/family. Our biggest battle, however, is not the conflict that is going on around us but the conflict that is going on within us.

✓ Illust: “The world: Your biggest problem is without; the solution is within. The Bible: Your biggest problem is within; the solution is without” (Matt Smethurst).

It is the battle between “*the desires of [our] flesh*” and “*the desires of the Spirit*.” Our help does not come from within – for we can neither be saved nor sanctified in and of ourselves. Our only help, our only hope, is through the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit that indwells all true believers the moment they are first saved.

➤ This truth is evident in the passage of Scripture that we are studying this morning. As always, it is important to remember the context this passage of Scripture. The divinely inspired book of Galatians was written by the apostle Paul in the midst of the first century. He wrote this letter “*to the churches of Galatia*” (1:2), to exhort them to remain faithful to the true Gospel – salvation by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. For false teachers had deceived them into thinking that they could be saved by good/religious works (or needed good works in order to obtain/maintain their salvation). Specifically, these false teachers (known as Judaizers), were teaching that a person must adhere to Jewish customs and laws – especially the act of circumcision – in order to truly be saved.

Paul’s letter to these Galatian Christians, is lovingly tough and candid. He sharply rebuked them for their deserting of God (1:6) in their turning to a false gospel:

**Gal 1:6-8** ~ “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – <sup>7</sup>not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

**Gal 5:2-6** ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup>I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup>For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

**Gal 6:15** ~ “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”

➤ As he had done when he had preached to them in person, Paul would again proclaim the truth of the Gospel:

**Gal 2:16** ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (see Gal.3:7, 9, 11, 14)

➤ Turning to Galatians 5:16-18, we find Paul (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) explaining that living by faith is not living a lawless/sinful life (see Gal.5:24), but a life that is lived in submission to the leading of God’s Holy Spirit.

**Gal 5:16-18** ~ “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

➤ Contrary to what many believe and teach today, living by the Spirit of God is not some mystical or irrational life. Simply put, living by the Spirit is walking in obedience to God. It is living according to God's Word and will.

✓ **Illust:** "The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ and implements Christ's work of redemption and baptism. He regenerates, baptizes, seals, gifts, and indwells all believers at conversion, progressively sanctifying, and securing them in Christ forever. The Spirit fills, leads, comforts, and intercedes for believers, empowering them for godly living and service. His presence is evident by the fruit of the Spirit and the building up of believers into the body of Christ, the Church" (SBC Doctrinal Statement).

Only those who are truly saved possess the indwelling presence and power of God's Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; Rom.8:9-11). In addition to being the deposit which guarantees our salvation (2Cor.1:22; 5:5; Eph.1:14), the indwelling Spirit enables/empowers believers to walk in obedience to God by empowering them to "put off" (Eph.4:22-24; Col.3:9), to "put to death" (Rom.6:6; 8:13; Col.3:5), to "renounce" (Tit.2:12) their sinful and worldly desires.

**Gal 2:20** ~ "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

**Gal 5:24** ~ "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Rom 8:7-8 ~ "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. <sup>8</sup>Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

➤ Galatians 5:16-18 can be outlined with three major headings.

### 1. **The Command** (vs.16)

➤ First, we need to identify the command in verse sixteen: "*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*" (vs.16). It is found in the imperative verb "walk" (*peripateō*). This Greek word (used almost 100 times in the New Testament, but only here in Galatians), is used literally to refer to a person "walking around" (primarily in the Gospels), or figuratively to describe the way in which a person is (or should be) living or behaving.

In this sense, walking is distinct from talking, feeling or even thinking. As the saying goes, "Talk is cheap." Christians are commanded to not only "talk the talk" but "walk the walk." The true Christian does not merely adhere to Christian doctrine and values, but seeks to be obedient to Christ. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is a follower of Jesus Christ. That is, they seek to be like Christ in everything they say and do.

**Eph 2:1-3** ~ "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked [*peripateō*], following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

**Eph 2:10** ~ "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk [*peripateō*] in them."

**Col 1:9-10** ~ "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so as to walk [*peripateō*] in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

**1 John 2:3-6** ~ “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk [*peripateō*] in the same way in which he walked [*peripateō*].”

➤ To say that you are a Christian and not strive to live like Christ is the very basis and nature of hypocrisy. A hypocrite is not someone who is struggling to live according to what they believe, but someone who is faking to live according to what they believe. The Greek word translated hypocrite (*hypokritēs*) in the New Testament literally referred to a play-actor, a person pretending to be something/someone they are not.

Jesus repeatedly condemned the Jewish leaders for their hypocrisy (in fact, our English words “pharisaical” or “pharisee” are synonymous with hypocrisy).

**Matt 23:1-3** ~ “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup>“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, <sup>3</sup>so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” [Jesus went on to condemn the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites” (*hypokritēs*) six times in Matt.23 (vs.13-29)]

**1 John 1:6-7** ~ “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk [*peripateō*] in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk [*peripateō*] in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

**1 John 3:9-10** ~ “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup>By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” (see vs.8)

➤ Christians are commanded by God to “*walk by the Spirit*” (vs.16). That is, to live in obedience and submission to the Holy Spirit of God. This is not an elective for Christians, or something that Christians do only when it is easy, beneficial or convenient. As Christians, we are to be living each day “in step” with the Spirit’s leading as He leads us in wisdom, godliness and righteousness. This is not theoretical, or even mystical. It is the conscious and willful decision to obey the commands of God – to “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him*” (Col.1:10).

**Romans 6:12-13** ~ “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup>Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

**Romans 13:13-14** ~ “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

➤ Notice the assurance that is given in verse sixteen: “... *walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*” (vs.16). As we will see, the way to not “*gratify the desires of the flesh*” is not simply trying to resist or repress our fleshly (sinful) desires. The way to overcome sin is not merely trying to overcome sin, in our own strength, passion or wisdom. The way to overcome sin is to do so by walking in the Spirit. We cannot simply will ourselves to be godly, or pull up our “spiritual/religious bootstraps” and gut-out a righteous life. We are fully depended on God’s enabling and leading.

✓ Illust: “It must be clear to us that mortification [i.e. the killing of sin], though it is something we do, cannot be carried out in our own strength. Well did the Puritan John Owen say, ‘Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness is the soul and

substance of all false religion.’ Mortification must be done by the strength and under the direction of the Holy Spirit” (Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, ch.9).

➤ Yet, we cannot passively wait on God to make us live righteously or force us (against our wills) to live a holy life. The saying, “Let go and let God” sounds religious and pious, but is in actuality a false spirituality. Walking by the Spirit does not release us from the responsibility we have to strive for godliness. While we cannot walk by the Spirit apart from God’s enabling power, we also cannot walk by the Spirit without deliberate and conscious effort on our part. Remember, “You can drift into sin, but not into righteousness” (Leon Morris).

✓ Illust: “It is time for us Christians to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are ‘defeated’ by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient! It might be good if we stopped using the terms ‘victory’ and ‘defeat’ to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms ‘obedience’ and ‘disobedience.’ When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may, in fact, be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey. We have chosen to entertain lustful thoughts, or to harbor resentment, or to shade the truth a little.

We need to brace ourselves up and to realize that we are responsible for our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We need to reckon on the fact that we died to sin's reign, that it no longer has any dominion over us, that God has united us with the risen Christ in all His power, and has given us the Holy Spirit to work in us. Only as we accept our responsibility and appropriate God's provisions will we make any progress in our pursuit of holiness” (Jerry Bridges; *The Pursuit of Holiness*, ch.8).

➤ In the same vein, Jesus used the illustration of a vine and branches:

**John 15:1-5** ~ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>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.”

➤ Our work in our pursuit of holiness is to abide in Christ (in the vine). We do this by “*walking by the Spirit.*” God’s part in our pursuit of holiness is to enable us, as we abide in Him, to produce the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal.5:22-23).

**Gal 2:20** ~ “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

**Col 1:28-29** ~ “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>For this I toil [*kopiaō*], struggling [*agonizomai*] with all his energy [*energeia*] that he powerfully [*dynamis*] works [*energeō*] within me.”

**Phil 2:12-13** ~ “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear [*phobos*] and trembling [*tromos*], <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works [*energeō*] in you, both to will and to work [*energeō*] for his good pleasure.”

➤ The truth is, while we are saved by God’s grace alone, we are not sanctified by God’s grace alone. God commands that we participate with Him in our own personal holiness. We cannot (on the one hand) live a holy life on our own, and we cannot (on the other hand) live a holy life without conscious and sincere effort on our part. It can be helpful to think of these as two wings on an airplane:

✓ Illust: “As you look at the two wings, imagine the words *dependence* [our work in the pursuit of holiness] on the left wing and *discipline* [God’s work in the pursuit of holiness] on the right wing. This airplane illustrated one of the most important principles in the Christian life. Just as the airplane must have both wings to fly, so we must exercise both discipline and dependence in the pursuit of holiness. Just as it is impossible for an airplane to fly with only one wing, so it is impossible for us to successfully pursue holiness with only dependence or discipline. We absolutely must have both” (Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*; p.121-122).

➤ So here is a promise given to us by God: “*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*” (vs.16). The natural, supernatural, result of walking by the spirit is not gratifying the desires of our sinful flesh.

The Greek word translated “*gratify*” (*teleō*) refers to that which is accomplished, perfected or completed [note: similar to the word Jesus used when, from the cross, He said: “It is finished”; Jn.19:30]. In Galatians 5:16, Paul is using this word to describe the carrying out or fulfilling of one’s sinful desires. In other words, our sinful desires will be thwarted – our temptations will be unfulfilled, unsatisfied – as we yield to the will and work of God’s Holy Spirit.

✓ Illust: “While you can’t keep the birds of temptation from flying around your head, you can keep them from nesting in your hair” (Martin Luther).

**James 1:14-15** ~ “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

➤ Notice the order: “*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*” (vs.16). When we walk by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The opposite is not true (i.e. not gratifying the desires of the flesh does not lead to walking by the Spirit). Again, it is only through walking by the Spirit that we can keep from sinning (i.e. gratifying the desires of the flesh).

## Conclusion

➤ To truly walk by the Spirit is a battle. It is a battle that we cannot win alone, but a battle that we most certainly can win with the Lord’s help. Next week, Lord willing, we will discover more about what it means to win the war within.