

Galatians 15 – Winning the War Within You
Pastor Deborah Oakley – 1/26/2025

Recently, we have seen a lack of integrity and character in many church leaders. One of the reasons for this is that many Spirit-filled churches are infatuated with spiritual gifts and people who are gifted. They put them on a pedestal and elevate them. Many times, at the expense of character.

You see Christians should resemble a fruit tree, not a Christmas Tree. We should be more concerned about the life and fruit a tree produces rather than twinkling lights and the gifts under the tree.

It's scriptural that a man's gift makes room for him. However, many times we "lay hands suddenly" on people. That means that we put them in a position of authority too soon. The result is that they display more of the flesh than the spirit.

We are all in a battle between the flesh and the spirit. We are going to examine that conflict today as we continue our study in Galatians with a sermon called Winning the War Within You. Galatians 5:13 says:

You have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Pastor Joe taught us last week that a major error that many people believe today is that grace gives us license or permission to sin. Permission to indulge our flesh. But that is not true. I want to be sure we understand the difference between flesh and spirit.

To understand this, we need to understand that **we are made up of spirit, soul and body**. Our body is the physical part of us that we see of each other. The soul is composed of the mind, will and emotions. The spirit is the innermost part of us where the Holy Spirit lives.

The word flesh is not referring to the human body. The human body is not evil. Being in the flesh is being controlled by the selfish unsanctified parts of our soul, mind, will and emotions – being motivated to please our self and our bodily appetites – rather than God. This is where the war within us takes place.

1. THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH ARE AT WAR

Many times, people think they aren't Christians because of temptation. They believe that if they were Christians they wouldn't be tempted. But **temptation is not a sin – giving in to the temptation is sin.**

We are in a war. I'm not talking about spiritual warfare here... which is warring

against demonic forces. Spiritual warfare is valid, but not all struggles are with demons.

There is another spiritual war and that is the war between the flesh and the spirit. **We take authority over the devil when sometimes we should be taking authority over our own fleshly desires.** Galatians 5:16-18 says:

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.

Notice that the flesh and the spirit are contrary to one another. They are in conflict and when the flesh wins, we end up doing things we don't want to do. Can you relate to this?

It's not unchristian to have this struggle. In fact, non-Christians do not have this kind of struggle because they do not have the Holy Spirit within. They are not fighting against the flesh – they are indulging it! But Paul teaches that this struggle is common to all Christians. He said in Romans 7:18-19

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.

We can all relate to this struggle between flesh and spirit. Paul describes it further in Romans 7:22-25.

***I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. (THAT'S SPIRIT)
But I see another law in my members, (THAT'S THE BODY) warring against the law of my mind, (THAT'S SOUL) and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (BODY)
O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 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.***

The war between the spirit and the flesh takes place in our minds. Satan knows that if he can seize control of your thought life, he can seize control of the rest of your life. That's why we need to take our thoughts captive and renew our minds. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

We either take our thoughts captive or we are captive to our thoughts!

When we are born again, the instantaneous changes are all spiritual changes. But you still have the same body and the same soul. Our spirit is saved, but not our soul. It is in the process of being saved.

Our souls are the place where we think, feel and decide. That means we still have thoughts that are sinful. We have emotions that can get out of control. When our will is weak - we give in to things like selfishness or addiction.

When we are under the control of those unsanctified parts of our soul, it can cause some people to wonder if they really are saved! What they don't realize is this: getting saved is not the end - it's the beginning of a new life.

Just as physical birth is the beginning of a life characterized by growth, so being born again is just the beginning of a lifetime of growth and change as we are transformed into the image of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 says:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

God wants to save us - spirit, soul and body! This is an ongoing process called sanctification where we are conformed to the image of Christ.

2. THE KEY TO VICTORY IS TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16 says:

Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

I love, love, love, love, love this. We normally get this totally backwards! We tend to constantly focus on fighting sin, temptation and lust. But when we focus on sin, we usually end up sinning.

The key to overcoming is to walk in the spirit rather than focusing on defeating the flesh. What does it mean to walk in the Holy Spirit?

Galatians 5:18 says:

When you are led by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

Walking in the spirit means to be led by the Holy Spirit, not the law.

Galatians 5:25 says:

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit is to live in the Spirit. The New Living Translation says it this way:

Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

This means to live your entire life in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be led by the Spirit in everything we do. Walk indicates movement and progress. That means we are not there yet, but we are making progress.

Walking in the Spirit also means to be empowered by the Spirit. To live your life in the power of the Spirit, not the power of your flesh. The difference between living in the spirit or the flesh is like the difference between trying to push your car or letting the motor move it. Many of us go through life trying to live it in our own strength and constantly failing.

But when we walk in the spirit we won't fulfill the desires of the flesh. It's not a negative command – don't fulfill the lust of the flesh. It's a positive command. Walk in the Spirit. It's not YOU trying to overcome the flesh or change the flesh. The key is walking in the Spirit – living in the power of the Spirit.

To help us understand the flesh and the spirit, Paul now shows us the results of walking in the spirit and the results of walking in the flesh. **You can know whether you are in the spirit or the flesh by which of these attributes describe your life.**

3. IDENTIFYING THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

Galatians 5:19-21 says:

The works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Let's make sure we understand each of these works of the flesh. The NIV says sexual immorality, but the King James Version says adultery and fornication. Adultery is when a married person has sex with someone who is not their spouse. Fornication is when unmarried people have sex. Basically, the Bible says that sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is committing sexual immorality.

IMPURITY speaks of anything that is morally impure.

DEBAUCHERY means licentiousness, which means believing that grace gives you license, or permission to sin.

IDOLATRY means putting someone or something else in God's place.

WITCHCRAFT – which tries to control God and people.

HATRED – (hostility – the opposite of love)

DISCORD – (strife – rivalry)

JEALOUSY – (wanting what someone else has)

FITS OF RAGE – (uncontrolled rage)

SELF-AMBITION Ambition is not wrong, but selfish ambition is.

DISSENSION – (disunity)

FACTIONS – (promoting your false doctrine like the Judaizers did)

ENVY– (more than jealousy. It's wanting what someone else has and not wanting them to have it.)

MURDER – to kill someone

DRUNKENOUS & ORGIES – these speak of partying involving drunkenness or drugs and out of control behavior sexual behavior.

These are the works of the flesh. It's not a comprehensive list, but it gives a clear picture of life lived in the power of the flesh. These works of the flesh war against our spirit.

Listen, believers may fall into one of these sins at some time, but they will not practice them habitually. They might commit a work of the flesh, but they will not live in the flesh. Paul says in Galatians 5:21

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Those who live in sin as a way of life - those who sin continually, habitually, and without repentance, will not inherit the kingdom of God! This is serious and many people don't like it. But it's what the Bible says. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says:

Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The Bible does not say, that is the way some of you are.

It says, that is the way some of you were.

But you've been saved and you're a new creation in Christ.

Again, this does not mean you never sin – but that you don't habitually practice sin without conviction of sin, sorrow for sin or repentance.

4. IDENTIFYING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23 says:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

LOVE – This is referring to Agape love. The God kind of love. It means seeking the highest good and laying down your life for others. All the other fruit of the spirit flow out of love.

JOY and PEACE – Deep inner tranquility that comes from being right with God.

PATIENCE – This means being able to wait. It also means being able to put up with and tolerate others.

KINDNESS – This is sweetness.

GOODNESS – means to be virtuous – morally righteous.

FAITHFULNESS – This means trustworthiness or being loyal.

GENTLENESS – This refers to being submissive and considerate.

SELF – CONTROL – This has to do with being able to restrain yourself. **When you are under the control of the Holy Spirit, you will not be out of control – emotionally, physically or any other way!**

All of us at times face - the war within - as we struggle to walk in the spirit and not give in to the flesh. One of my biggest struggles with winning this war of flesh versus Spirit occurs when I feel like someone has disrespected me. This really triggers me. When that happens, things like patience, goodness and gentleness are not my inward response. I want to defend myself. I can feel anger and frustration rising within me.

But thank God for the Holy Spirit's restraint. I can literally feel God's power at work in me to shut my mouth. My natural, fleshly response is emotional; however the Holy Spirit is teaching me to pause, take a breath and think before I speak.

What's really awesome though, is that when I yield to the Holy Spirit I maintain my peace and joy. I'm not perfect at this but I'm a work in progress as we all are.

I've learned that maturity is when you can step back and respond with intention rather than impulsively reacting to things.

I've learned that strength isn't about being the loudest voice in the room.

I've learned that when I react immediately and let my flesh dictate my actions, I've lost the war within.

I've learned that Holy Spirit self-control is one of the most powerful strengths a person can possess.

5. TRUTH ABOUT FLESH AND SPIRIT

The flesh works - The Spirit bears fruit. Bearing the fruit of the spirit does not come by working for it, but by resting in Christ, trusting in Christ and obeying Christ.

Jesus is the one behind salvation and justification. The Holy Spirit is the one behind sanctification and maturity.

The works of the flesh are plural, they have many roots and ways of expression. The fruit of the spirit is singular – they all come from the same root, the Holy Spirit and they are all grown in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

We can't save ourselves or sanctify ourselves. Fruit is not self-created. It is not a human quality or achievement. It is an outward expression of the inner life of the Holy Spirit of God. Because of that, there is no room for pride. That's why Galatians 5:26 says:

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

When we walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh, we are not prideful because we realize that anything good in us is a fruit of the Spirit. We also do not envy others because we know that anything good in them is a fruit of the Holy Spirit!

Anything good in us is a result of the Holy Spirit in us. And all the fruit of the spirit is for all Christians. It's not parceled out like the gifts. Fruit is grown and it takes time.

In closing, Galatians 5:24-25 says:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The flesh cannot be improved – it must be crucified.

Not only must we die to our selfishness and fleshly behavior, but we must also die to the passions and lusts that drive our behavior!

Strong's Concordance says this means to **crucify the craving for what is forbidden**. The flesh craves forbidden fruit, but the spirit produces godly fruit! It won't work to try to crucify sinful behavior without also crucifying the sinful desires that motivate the behavior.

Remember – the key is to not focus on not sinning - but focus on walking in the power of the Spirit. The key is also to love God more than we love sin!

**When we walk in the Spirit, we will not walk in the flesh!
When we live in the Spirit, we will not live in sin!**

As Jesus said in John 15:4-5

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

So – to win the war within you - get your focus off yourself and your sin and focus on walking in the Spirit.

Abide in Christ and let His word abide in you and you will see much Christlike fruit in your life!

Apart from Him – which means being in the flesh – you can do nothing!

But through Him – being in the Spirit – you can do all things!