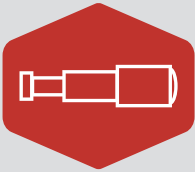




Lesson 12: The Battle Within

Main Idea: The apostle Paul delves into the lifestyle differences between living according to the Spirit and according to the flesh. He points out that how we live is like a battle waged internally. Warfare and battles are metaphors used throughout the Bible to represent walking with God. In this lesson, you will explore this battle and how it is won.

Scripture: Galatians 5:14–26



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

In this lesson, Paul addresses the spiritual battle the Galatians are fighting in their new relationship in Christ. In fact, most of his letter is taken up by this subject. Bible scholar and professor Robert K. Rapa states, “The Judaizers had brought the message of [religious] law observance to the Galatian churches, and this situation has consumed much of Paul’s energy in the letter to this point.”¹

In Galatians 5:13, Paul tells the Galatian believers not to use their freedom as an “opportunity for the flesh.” Most translations use this English word, but some use the word “excuse” and others use “indulge.” What Paul wanted the Galatians to know was that they should not allow their liberty in God as a license to sin, because in doing so, they would miss the whole point of liberty. Rapa points out that “The idea of ‘freedom in Christ’ was apparently being

¹ Robert K. Rapa, “Galatians,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 11:624.

embraced by some in a manner that led them to self-centered excesses in morally questionable behavior.”² Paul reminds the Galatians that the liberties they should be taking are those to love and serve.

Because of Jesus, Galatian believers have the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, they could do what they could never do by trying to keep the Law. In the following verses (verses 14–26), Paul outlines how the Spirit loves, overcomes the flesh, and produces fruit.

Paul continues to lead the Galatians in growth by using this section of his letter to tell them that although God’s love was shed abroad in their hearts, they were not acting like it. We do not know for sure, but perhaps the Galatian Christians had infighting between the group who believed Paul was correct and the group who believed the Judaizers (verse 15).

In verses 16–21, Paul begins a significant discussion about the war that goes on inside the believer. He outlines how the Spirit helps the believer overcome the flesh. The reason believers experience an internal war is that they now have a new nature alongside the old. The old nature is the previous pattern of thinking, doing, and living before knowing Christ. In verse 16, Paul calls it the “flesh.” The Greek word for “flesh” refers not only to the physical body but also to the old nature. Some translations use the phrase “sinful nature.”

The idea behind humans having a sinful nature comes from Genesis chapter 3 when the original sin was introduced to mankind. Basically, the original sin was that Adam wanted to be in charge, meet his own needs, and satisfy his own desires. Paul continues referring to these selfish thoughts in verse 17 with the use of the word “desire.” Desire is an extreme longing for what a person deeply wants. The flesh desires independence from God—a desire that goes back to the Garden of Eden. The temptation said that God could not be trusted and that His goodness was not dependable. Paul draws the battle line in his letter to the Galatians (He also addresses it in Romans 7:22–23). To win the battle, Paul tells the Galatians, they need to know who they are in Christ. Self and Christ will always be at war.

Throughout Galatians, we see a battle between Law and Spirit. The Galatians did not need to follow the Law of Moses because the Spirit had come to give a new way of living and obeying God. Paul explains to the Galatians that following the Spirit brought them into right relationship with God.

In verses 19–21, Paul provides a list for the Galatians to know whether they are walking in the flesh or the Spirit. From these verses, the works of the flesh (sin) can be divided into four categories: sexual sins, spiritual sins, social sins, and substance sins.

² Rapa, 11:624.

Paul lists sexual sins in verse 19. God is not against sex, but He wants believers to participate in sex within His boundaries: a covenant marriage between a man and a woman. Any sexual behavior outside of God’s boundaries is a work of the flesh.

In verse 20, Paul lists the spiritual sins of idolatry and sorcery. These had to do with pagan worship. These also involved using means outside of God—outside prayer, obedience to God, and other spiritual disciplines—to change events in people’s favor.

The other seven sins Paul list in verse 20 are social sins that work to destroy communities and lives. These works of the flesh are enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. We have all seen evidence of the devastating power of these actions.

In verse 21, Paul lists the substance sins: drunkenness and orgies. These involve the abuse of substances that intoxicate. Paul uses the phrase “and things like these,” which means this is not an exhaustive list. There are many works of the flesh, and Paul points out a few. If a Galatian’s predominant sin was not directly listed, it was still implied. In verse 21 Paul point out that “those who do such things” will not inherit the kingdom of God. This was not saying that if they ever committed one of these sins, they were out of God’s kingdom. No, Paul was telling them that if they *regularly* practiced these sins as a way of living, they were obviously not part of God’s kingdom.

In verses 22–23, Paul shows the Galatians that life in the Spirit produces fruit. He uses the word “fruit” in the singular case, yet lists nine fruit. Saying, “the fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love” stays within the context of what Paul teaches throughout Galatians. The antidote to the Law is the Spirit. If the Galatians are led by the Spirit, they will love, which fulfills the Law. In the context of the letter to the Galatians, this was the best picture for Paul to get his meaning across: it was all about love.

The eight words Paul uses after *love* describe what the Holy Spirit’s love is like. It is a very balanced love. This fruit of the Spirit goes beyond natural personality. It is a joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, and so on through the rest of the descriptors. Paul is describing what the fruit of the Spirit looks like in an individual’s life. The Spirit produces His fruit of love within a believer, and when that happens, the believer looks like Jesus.

Paul concludes this portion of his letter (verses 24–26) by describing three things that will happen when the Galatian believers walk in the Spirit. First, they will be crucified with Jesus (verse 24). A person cannot crucify himself. Paul, in Galatians 2:20, informs the Galatians they were crucified at the cross of Jesus. In other words, Jesus died for them and in their place. Then it is up

to them to enforce that crucifixion on the old nature. Their old patterns of thinking and living will still come through their new mind and heart. They must die to those old patterns, realizing they're not who they are anymore. They are no longer independent, living in their old way, but are now submitted to Christ, learning how to live in Him.

The second thing Paul says will happen when they come under the control of the Spirit is that they will walk with Jesus (Galatians 5:25). This is what keeping in step with the Spirit is all about. What a person feeds in their life will live, and what they starve will die. In verse 17, Paul wrote that both the flesh and the Spirit lust. What does the flesh lust after? Independence. To live my own way, call my own shots, and gratify myself. In contrast, the Spirit lusts after Jesus: to glorify, exalt, and demonstrate the beauty, love, power, and grace of Jesus.

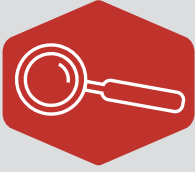
Finally, Paul informs the Galatians that if they walk in the Spirit, they will become like Jesus (verse 26). Paul cautions the Galatian believers away from becoming “conceited,” which can happen through religious activity when believers use it to measure themselves against others. This can lead to feeling superior or envious, but God’s end game is to transform the believer to be like Jesus, not to be better than the next person. Becoming like Jesus happens as believers recognize that their flesh was crucified so they could walk after Jesus in the power of the Spirit, by whom the fruit of love is produced.



My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

- When you give your life to others in love, you will find it (v. 14).
- We live free when we walk by the Spirit (vv. 16–26).
- Who will win the battle of our wills: the flesh or Spirit (vv. 16–26)?
- The Spirit shapes us into the kind of people who can overcome and rise above the desires of the flesh (v. 17).
- The fight with the flesh is ongoing, and we will always be exposed to the power of the flesh (v. 17).
- The flesh is selfish and will at times be supreme until we yield to the Spirit's domination (v. 17).
- Practicing works of the flesh will result in no spiritual inheritance (v. 21).
- God's fruit is the outward expression of Christ dwelling on the inside (vv. 22–23).
- If our lives are filled with the works of the flesh, there is no room for the Spirit (vv. 24–26).
- If we walk in the fruit of the Spirit, there is no need for legalistic codes to regulate our lives (vv. 24–26).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following question here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.

- Who appears in this passage?

- Where is this passage taking place?

- When is this passage occurring?

- Why is this passage important?

- What is happening in this passage?

- How does this passage apply to my life?

(Continued from *Fire Bible* article “The Acts of the Sinful Nature and the Fruit of the Spirit”)

» How can a believer overcome and destroy sin’s power?

» Read through the explanation for each of the nine types of fruit. Rate yourself 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, on how you display each fruit. Then write out a plan to improve the display of God’s fruit in your life.

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

Your plan to improve:

- Look in your *Fire Bible* index for the article titled “Individual Apostasy” and answer the following:
 - » Describe the Greek term for *apostasy* in your own words.

 - » Describe what it means to apostatize in your own words.

